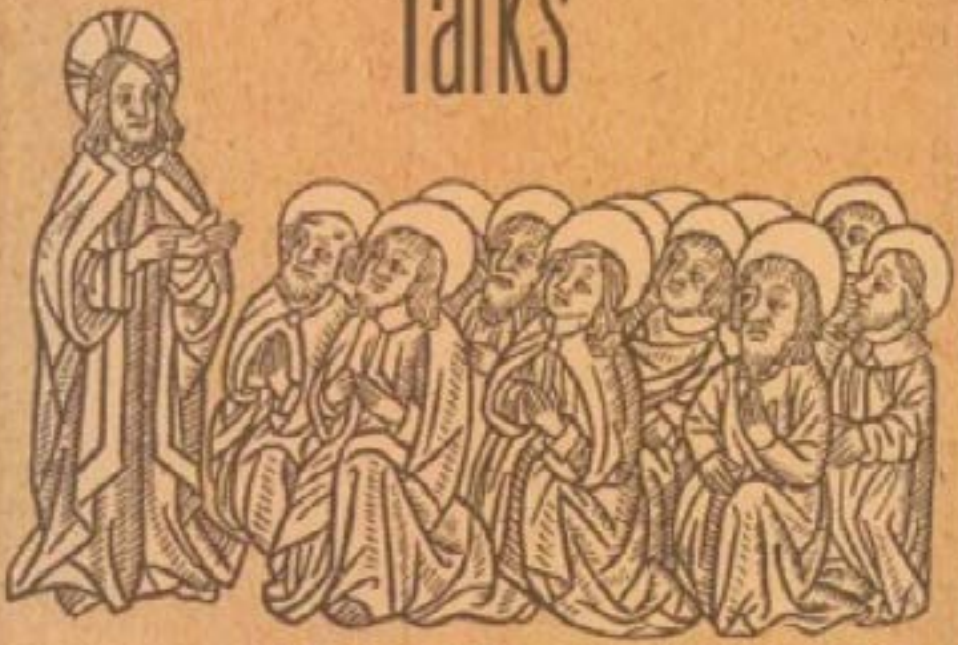
Priest

DANIEL SYSOEV

Catechetical Talks



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In 2004 His Holiness Aleksiy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, described catechetical talks as part of "traditional parish missionary efforts" (presentation at the 2004 Diocesan Conference).

The church fathers — Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, and others — likewise wrote of the necessity of catechesis before baptism, and the Savior Himself gave His apostles the commandment: *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost* (Mt. 28:19).

This book is compiled from catechetical talks given by the missionary priest Daniel Sysoyev beginning in 2001, at the Yasneva metochion of the Optina Hermitage in Moscow. The printed texts of the talks preserve the spoken conversational style, drawing the reader in with numerous straightforward examples and clear answers to the catechumens' "tricky" questions. The majority of those who attended Father Daniel's talks became regular parishioners at Orthodox churches following their baptism.

This book will benefit catechizers, clergy, theological students, and all who wish to *be always ready to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear* regarding the principles of the faith. Being actual dialogs on questions of faith and the Church, these talks will likewise be of interest to the catechumens themselves.

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ON GOD
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FATHER DANIEL: Peace be unto you. Today we are going to talk about God. Who is He? What is He like? Often in talking about the Almighty people show themselves to be dreadfully ignorant. When a person who is preparing for baptism states that he believes in God, one always has to clarify in which exactly, because often people who come to baptism have as their god the cosmos, or their conscience, or an energy, or something else. One person even said that God is something people made up to give their life meaning. And this was someone who had come to be baptized! We will baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; hence, anyone who believes otherwise cannot be baptized. Once I had someone who wanted to be baptized tell me that he did not believe in the Trinity, but that "there was definitely something out there." I replied that I was certainly not going to baptize him in the name of "something". And so what I want to learn from you is this: what do you believe about God? Who is God?

ATTENDEE: A Higher Power.

FD: What is this Power higher than? Higher than the ceiling? Or is It "higher" meaning a higher being? But if It is just a Power, how can It be higher than we, who are self-aware? No, while this definition is correct, it is far from sufficient.

A: The Creator.

FD: Correct. What other definitions can we give?

A: Sovereign, omnipotent, omnipresent…

FD: Quite right. Let's begin at the beginning. I prefer to begin by calling God "the Creator". Why? Because this is the most precise definition, the one with which the martyrs would ordinarily begin their preaching. When a Christian had been arrested and brought to the judge for questioning, he was asked: "Why do you not worship our gods — our idols and statues, of gold, silver, and stone?" And he would answer: "Why should I worship the works of men's hands? I worship God the Creator, who created all things living". As the prophet says: *The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens* (Jer. 10:11). Whoever acknowledges the Creator is inwardly free from all created things. Faith in God as Creator makes it easier to understand the rest of His properties. We see that the world is one. It exists according to unified laws; hence, its Author — God — is also one. There are not many different gods. If there were, they would be in a state of constant struggle, destroying the world. Here we must make a clarification without which we could become confused later on. What does *Creator* mean? How is creating different from begetting? Is there any difference between these two concepts?

A: No.

FD: No? So making a chair and begetting a child are exactly the same thing? A chair and a child are not fundamentally different in any way?

A: Yes, they are different.

FD: How? What is the fundamental difference between them? Correct: a child and his parents are people, whereas a chair, a tape recorder, and a painting are inanimate objects. Their essence is different. Using this analogy, let's see what the concept of creation entails. Creation differs in essence from the Creator, just as a chair is different from the woodworker. And since the Creator differs from His creation, we obviously cannot find the Creator Himself inside the creation. When we look at a photograph we don't see the photographer, unless it's a self-portrait, but we do see the ideas and feelings the photographer wanted to express. This is very important.

God is not gold, or silver, or air, or earth, or the cosmos, or the stars, or cosmic energy, or a cosmic intelligence. Why? Because the cosmos are created, but the Creator is outside creation; hence, God is not a cosmic intelligence. He cannot be a star; hence, the stars do not rule a person. Astrology — worshiping the celestial bodies instead of God — is idolatry; we must not believe in it. Likewise, God is not man. He is not a higher part of man, He is not man's soul. For this reason the statement "I have God in my soul", which suggests that God is a part of the soul, is erroneous. God is the Creator of the soul, but not the soul itself. God is the Creator of man, but not man himself. So is God a Father for everyone?

A: Yes, everyone.

FD: Not exactly. Let's take a closer look. We have agreed that one can only beget someone of the same essence as the begetter. God is the Father of Christ,

and through Him He adopts us. This adoption is given through Baptism. For the unbaptized, God is not their Father. An unbaptized person cannot read the prayer "Our Father", because he does not have God as his Father. For him God is merely the Creator, to Whom he naturally matters, and Who loves and cares for him. Hence, when people want to receive baptism, we tell them: be sure to pray, for without prayer one cannot come to God. But it is best to pray in the words of the psalms, addressing God as Creator.

God is outside the universe: since He is not creation, but rather its Creator, He is beyond the limits of space and time. The universe exists in space and time. And since God is outside space, He is also outside matter; therefore, He is not material, because we call Him a Spirit, meaning a Being Who possesses no material body. We should not think that God has hands, or feet, or a head. Back in the fourth century the Church condemned the heresy that claimed God had a body like that of a man. We should not think that God is an elderly man sitting on a cloud. He has neither taste, nor color, nor smell, nor form, because these are material traits. He cannot be depicted. God is outside space, since He is not limited by it, and has no dimensions. God is absolutely infinite. But we should not misunderstand this: *infinite* does not mean "enormous", but rather refers to Him Who is beyond space. And this is why we say that God is omnipresent: if He were limited by space He would not be the Creator. He would be a finite being, not God.

A: So why can't we refer to Him as the cosmos? Are the cosmos the devil?

FD: God cannot be the cosmos because He is its Creator. I'm talking about the material cosmos, not the one occultists write about. The cosmos is not the devil. However, in the Bible Satan is indeed called the master of the cosmos, or the prince of this world — in the Greek, "of this cosmos". But he is called this not because he owns the visible cosmos, but rather because he is master of those who worship the visible cosmos as God, serving the visible cosmos. One who serves the cosmos, that is, creation instead of the Creator, is in the devil's kingdom. The devil did not create it; he merely seized control of it through lies and deceit.

The word "cosmos" has two meanings in modern language: there is the cosmos of "outer space" that astronomers observe, which is God's creation; and then there is the "cosmos" with which sorcerers make contact. The concept of "the world" is also not unequivocal: the word is often used to describe the entire body of people who live contrary to God's will — the world ruled by the devil, as Scripture says.

A: You say the world was created, but the world really resulted from a "big bang" that happened billions of years ago.

FD: How do you know?

A. Science has proven it.

FD: And are you personally certain of that?

A. Scientists say it's true.

FD: Scientists used to believe the world rested on elephants; now they claim it came from a big bang.

A. But what about the theory of evolution, which has been proven?

FD: Those are all hypotheses, which change over time. Read Darwin carefully: he presented his theory as a hypothesis, and wasn't fully convinced of it himself. There is nothing less authoritative than the latest scientific hypotheses. In general, the past is not the domain of science, especially the pre-human past: there are no methods of observation, leaving only suppositions. The past cannot be subjected to experimentation, and the pre-human past cannot even be verified by witness testimony. All discussions of what science has proven about how the world began are mere pseudo-scientific mythology.

A: When Christ was born, they say there was a shooting star of some sort, and the wise men followed it… So where does this leave your statement that the stars don't affect anything?

FD: The star of Bethlehem did not influence anyone. It didn't draw the wise men; it only pointed the way, giving a sign that God had been born.

A: It was a sign?

FD: Of course. A sign deliberately given by God. The wise men were astrologers, and they were given a sign they could understand. What's more, the Lord gave them this sign so the wise men would stop practicing astrology. The star was not a shooting star; it moved contrary to all the laws of celestial mechanics. Instead of moving from east to west, it moved from northeast to southwest. This was the only way to motivate the wise men to follow the star and to

indicate the place where the Infant lay. This was a divine miracle, manifested to show the absurdity of worshiping the celestial bodies.

Let's return to our conversation about God. Take the statement that God is omnipresent. We believe this to be so. David the Psalmist says: *Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee* (Ps. 138:7–12[1]).

God fills all things, both Heaven and earth. He is everywhere, in His entirety, yet is limited by nothing. He is not contained by the heavens of Heaven, yet it is said that He dwells in the contrite of heart — those who are humble and tremble at His words: *I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones … but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word* (Is. 57:15, 66:2). We cannot say that the Lord fills all

[1] Quotes from Holy Scripture are taken from the King James Version, with the following exceptions: psalms are numbered as in the original Russian, according to the Greek Septuagint text, and pronouns relating to God have been capitalized. — *Trans.*

things equally. He is present in varying degrees in the hearts of the sinner and of the righteous man. He is present in one way in the temple of God — since it is the house of the Living God, according to His own words: *Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people* (Is. 56:7) — and in a completely different way in, say, a bar. God can certainly be there, too, but as Judge. In the church God's presence is particularly palpable: there His particular power is at work, enlivening our souls, transfiguring our hearts, cleansing our sins. But the Lord Himself does not change based on the state of the people who receive Him. And nothing that exists in space can influence Him.

Now let's talk a little about the divine relationship with time that is known as eternity. Scripture says that God is eternal. What does this mean?

A. Outside time.

FD: So what does it mean to be outside time? How can we picture this?

A. His lifespan is infinite.

FD: This is an erroneous perception, an incorrect understanding of what infinity is. It is incorrect to say that God lived a billion years ago, and another billion years ago, and another billion years ago.

God is outside the passage of time altogether. With Him there is neither past nor future; with Him it is always the present. When God the Father says to His Son: *this day have I begotten Thee* (Ps. 2:7), "this day" means "now", because with Him it is always now. The Lord stands above the

passage of time and sees everything at once. This is why He foresees the future. The only one who knows the future in its entirety is God. For Him it is not the future; He does not make calculations and anticipate what will happen next. We are limited by time, but He is not limited. God stands above time, and has no need to analyze. God does not suppose; He knows.

The demons try to anticipate the future through calculations, using methods similar to scientific prognosis. Some things can be predicted by scientific methods, but others can be miscalculated. There is a certain degree of probability that something will or will not occur. The demons use a similar approach, but they also employ the Revelation known to us. They know the Bible, and then they have their own plans. They have long-range programs, such as starting a war. They can pit nation against nation. They may reveal this plan to a fortune teller, who will say: There will be a war in such and such a place. But the war may happen, or it may not, because besides Satan's desires everything depends on two factors: man's free will, which can choose good or evil, and the will of God. A ruler may repent, and the war will not ensue; or God may will otherwise — and, say, all the weapons may malfunction. And all the fortune teller's predictions will be proven false.

Thus, God is outside time, and being outside time He is also outside change. *For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed*

(Mal. 3:6). Since He is outside time and unchanging, His words, too, are unchanging.

A: Then what about the repentance of Nineveh? Didn't God break His word?

FD: God does not break His word; all His words are the simple Truth. The Lord says that fornication must be punished, but if a man repents he escapes the action of God's retributive decree. The same with Nineveh: punishment was promised to thieves and evildoers, and they would indeed have been punished. But Nineveh repented and ceased to be sinful, and so was not punished. It is unjust to rain down punishment upon the penitent. We should remember that these situations are not governed by mechanical laws, which fail to take living beings into account, but by the free good will of God. Picture this, for example: suppose I tell an alcoholic that if he keeps on getting drunk I won't pour him another glass. But then the man stops drinking. Five years go by, and he comes to me half frozen and shaking. So I pour him a shot of vodka to warm him up. Have I broken my word? No, I have not.

A: Why?

FD: Because he stopped being a drunkard. The logic is very simple: if you don't change your ways, you will incur punishment. God says just that: If I go to this nation or that city, I will bring great calamity upon them for their sins; but if that nation changes its ways, and begins to do good, I will forbear punishment. If I wish to bring some blessing upon a nation, and it begins to do evil, I will forebear

the good I wished to do. Here God has not changed; what has changed is what incurred His action. If a sinner repents and begins to do good, repents, confesses, and asks God's forgiveness, his iniquities will no longer be remembered. On the other hand, if a righteous man does righteous works, but then, confident in his righteousness, commits an evil act, thinking that the cup of his good works will outweigh it, God will say that no good works will be remembered in the day of retribution, and that he will perish for his iniquity.

A: Does God really approve of evil, and even cause it?

FD: No.

A: Take a Nazi who's about to shoot some little children. Where is God then? Does He approve of this?

FD: The Nazi does the shooting; that is his choice. God may prevent him, or He may not. Once again, why? He sees the state of the children. If they die now, where will their souls go? If they will go to Him, He doesn't prevent it. They will go to the Lord, and become saints, and be bodily resurrected. If this is the case, death is no longer a problem; murder is no threat to them. But God may also protect them. Why? Perhaps, say, because they are unbaptized. The Lord wishes to save them so that they can be baptized. If He knows they will be baptized, He saves them from death. He may also save their lives because He knows that one of those children will grow up to be a great saint who will save many other

people. But in no case does God make the Nazi shoot innocent people.

A: Is it the soldiers' fault if they obey orders?

FD: They could disobey orders. An order that contradicts God's law must not be obeyed.

A: No, I mean that they're obeying the orders of their commanding officers. It's the commanding officer's crime, not the soldier's.

FD: It is still indisputably the soldier's crime. Any soldier who carries out a criminal order commits a crime. One must obey God, not men; this is the rule for all Christians.

Let's continue our discussion of the properties of God Himself. We know that He does not change. We see His strength; we believe that He is omnipotent, and can do whatever He wishes. And this omnipotence was manifested not only in creation, but in the fact that God is the Pantocrator — the Ruler of all. He rules the world to this day. He holds the world in His hands. He gives existence to what exists, life to all that lives, and reason to the rational.

We must remember that the Lord hears the prayers not only of Christians, but of others, as well. In fact, God hears all who call upon Him. For example, in Indonesia there is a tribe called the Semang. They only remember God during typhoons. Ordinarily they work sorcery, offering sacrifices to the demons, but when a hurricane blows up that the demons and idols are unable to stop, then they fall down before God: "Creator, please don't! We're with You; please forgive us …" And why don't they do this

always? Because, to put it quite plainly, they don't want to live a godly life.

God hears all who call upon Him, and if their petition is to the good He grants it. But the Lord only saves those who have been sacramentally united with Him. It is important to distinguish between being heard and being saved. Some say: We prayed and God heard us, so we must be in the right. But this is not so. Rather, they should say: We were right to pray, but wrong in not wishing to be churched. This error is very widespread.

There are instances when God clearly intervenes: for example, a person calls upon the Almighty, praying as his plane is falling or his car is burning, and the Lord hears him. Then the person relaxes and says: "My relationship with God is just fine; stop bothering me to repent." But does this really mean that our whole life is justified by a single fervent prayer? Of course not. In patristic literature there is a story about how one harlot was walking along the road and saw the child of a widow, who had just died. This so touched her that she fell on her knees and began to pray: "O God, forgive me, a harlot, for addressing You. I know that I'm a harlot and the worst of transgressors, but not for the sake of me, a vile sinner, but rather for the sake of this widow's tears, restore him to life." And the infant was restored to life. But this doesn't mean that her fornication was justified.

A person who cries out to the Lord has to change, to end his sin. What many people do is this: they call on God, He helps them, and then the person

turns around and walks off without so much as a "thank you". Unfortunately, the dreadful phenomenon of monstrous ingratitude is really quite common. The scriptures likewise say: *Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked … then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation* (Deut. 32:15). The same thing happens today. For example, do many thank God after confession for forgiving them their sins? Unfortunately, after confession it doesn't occur to us to thank God, and yet we have received such a gift! The Lord has given us forgiveness of sins just like that, free for the asking. And we say: He has to do it; it's His duty. This is wrong. We must give thanks for everything.

Now let's consider what *omnipotent* means. Various classic questions arise: can God create a stone too heavy for Him to lift? But we must remember that the Lord can do anything He wishes: omnipotence is a manifestation of His will; consequently, it cannot contradict His will. For example, God cannot do evil. But does that really limit His omnipotence? The Lord cannot lie or say foolish things. But does that really negate His omnipotence? God is omnipotent precisely because He does whatever He wills. There are things that the Lord can do, but does not wish to do. For example, He could destroy the universe, but does not wish to do this, because He is true to His word.

There are two concepts of God: that He is impersonal, and that He is a Person. What do you think? Is God impersonal, or is He a Person? Can God say "I", or not? There is a widespread misguided belief that

God is a kind of force. For example, according to pantheism God is everything; He is a cosmic force. This is a mistaken opinion: an impersonal God would be inferior to the person of man, which would be completely absurd, foolish. Of course God is a person. The chief properties of a person are intellect, senses, and will.

Let's consider the property of God's intellect. We know that the Lord possesses an omnipotent intellect: His intellect is so great that He has no need of advice from anyone. Who has ever been advisor to God, or told Him what He ought to do? *For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor?* (Rom. 11:34). This property of superior intellect is called wisdom, meaning the superior wisdom of God. God is so wise that His thoughts are as far removed from our thoughts as Heaven is from the earth.

The property of the Lord's superior wisdom lies in that He is superiorly wise, and this wisdom is so great as to make Him incomprehensible. We know that God is incomprehensible: He cannot be described by human standards, and His intellect likewise is beyond the bounds of human standards. But it is not opposed to them; rather, it intersects with them the way a straight line intersects with a bisecting line. It would be absurd to think that absolute infinity could be limited by something like our knowledge or understanding, even though that limited part which we call the Truth is part of God's knowledge. The Lord knows everything that man knows, and infinitely more.

Many think that God's knowledge is of one kind, and ours is of another. But this is an absurdity! If our knowledge were different from God's, we would be unable to use it. Furthermore, the very ability to think is something we possess because, according to St. John of Kronstadt, we are within divine reason just as we are within the air around us. Divine reason gives us the ability to think, the atmosphere for thought. Without the atmosphere of the Great Intellect no-one would be able to reason or think at all. The Lord gives everyone life, and breath, and thought, and reason, and He is truly the One Who Is, the source of all. The Lord's thought process, however, is fundamentally different from ours. How do we acquire information?

A: Usually through our sensory organs. Or else a thought just suddenly occurs.

FD: There are two ways of acquiring information: either a spiritual entity, such as an angel or a demon, puts its own ideas into our heads, or we acquire information from our sensory organs. Then we analyze it, conceptualize it, and file it in our knowledge system. But the Lord's thought process is different. God Himself is a simple Being: He is not made up of different parts, He is not complex, and hence His thoughts are simple. He knows everything exactly as it is. Human thought is frequently mistaken; at times we mistake things for something other than what they are. The crudest example would be a person who gets drunk and sees two doors instead of one. But even in everyday life people often assess each other not as the image of God, not as real beings

with good and evil qualities. Instead they see their companions as objects from which something may be gained. In other words, their attitude is admittedly nonobjective. Unfortunately, more often than not, people today are incapable of seeing things as they truly are.

The more a person sins, the less capable he is of seeing things objectively. For example, it is astounding the way people in the world perceive the weather. Often people are dissatisfied with any kind of weather, because through sin they have reached an extreme degree of subjectivity. And this has occurred because the fall into sin has given rise to the realm of the imagination called fantasy.

A: What's so bad about fantasy?

FD: Fantasy is not merely fiction. It is a sphere of distorted ideas, ideas that have become so distorted that we cannot see things as they are. There is only one escape: to learn to see the world from God's point of view. Only in this way can we see things as real: by looking at everything through His eyes, through uniting with Him. The saints see things as they truly are. Even the Bible can only really be understood by viewing it through the eyes of the saints. There is no other way, because otherwise we will see the Bible as we fancy it, and this will produce as many bibles as there are people, or even more, since the same person can mentally create several completely mutually exclusive bibles. Instead we must see everything through God's eyes. To do this we need to be united with Him. He gives us reason.

On the other hand, we must remember that there are limits to our awareness. There are things beyond which we simply cannot proceed, because they are incomprehensible. For example, when Anthony the Great asked God why some are rich and others poor, why some live long lives and others short ones, he received this answer: "Anthony, attend to yourself; these things are not useful for you to know, because this is beyond comprehension." This is a very important principle. A Christian is humble; he knows the limits of what can be comprehended. It was in Soviet times that people used to say human reason knows no bounds. There definitely are limits to human reason. No one of us can know absolutely everything about even the simplest of things. Can you fully describe even a simple stick of wood, give a complete breakdown of it on all levels — say, at the quantum level?

A: In time you could.

FD: In other words, it is practically impossible for our reason in its current state. This means that human reason cannot comprehend all things or at all times.

There are things that we can and must comprehend; there are things that we can comprehend, but that are nonessential; there are things that we can comprehend, but should not; and there are things that we cannot and should not comprehend. This is what Christian humility means.

The things we can and must learn are those that concern the salvation of our souls, correcting our life, and living according to God's will. Everything

that concerns union with God and transfiguring our life is what we can and must do.

There are things we can learn, but which we do not have to know. This pertains to knowledge of the nature of things. We can study science, or we can not study it. There is no sin in it, as long as you don't try to pit science against God. Science is not a bad thing, but neither is it essential.

There is knowledge that we can acquire, but that we absolutely must not employ. Here we mean evil: we may know evil, but under no circumstances is it permissible to put it into practice.

Finally, there are phenomena that we cannot know and ought not to try. These are things that are incomprehensible, that reflect the nature and essence of God Himself, His inner essence, how He lives within His own Self. We cannot know this, and ought not to try.

Let's talk about reason. A great many people say that God knows everything, but that it's still possible to hide from Him. I read a story about how one little girl wanted to sneak some candy from her mother, and turned the icon to face the wall so God wouldn't notice. Adults, too, behave in a similar fashion. But God knows and sees all. The Bible states this clearly. The book of the wisdom of Joshua ben Sirach says this: *A man that breaketh wedlock, saying thus in his heart, Who seeth me? I am compassed about with darkness, the walls cover me, and no body seeth me; what need I to fear? the most High will not remember my sins: Such a man only feareth the eyes of men, and knoweth not that the eyes of the Lord are*

ten thousand times brighter than the sun, beholding all the ways of men, and considering the most secret parts (Sirach 23:18–19). God knows all the works of men — every one of them, without exception. All the unrepented sins of men that have not been washed with the Savior's Blood will stand before the Lord, and He will cast them into the faces of sinners. And all men will behold them.

God knows not only the works of men, but even their thoughts, all the secrets of the heart. The Lord foresees all our deeds even before they are committed. He knows absolutely everything. And this is why we cannot fully appreciate His compassion, and must not judge the things He does. God possesses greater knowledge than men. We say: "What a good person! How could he have fallen so low, and why did the Lord let that happen to him?" It has been noted that those who consider themselves very good people fall harder and more frequently into sin. The most terrible state is that of pridefulness, and the most terrible sin is pride. To God, even murder is not so terrible as pride, because a man can commit murder in a fit of passion and then repent, while pride, if a person remains proud, bars repentance from the heart and destroys a person. It is also completely impermissible to murmur against God. This kind of murmuring is a grave sin; you do not know everything about yourself that God knows. You do not know what is best or worst for you.

A: What do you mean by murmuring? Criticism?

FD: Criticism of God. There is a being that is called "the critic" or "the slanderer" — in Greek, the devil.

A: So *criticism* and *the devil* are the same?

FD: Well, let's say they're similar. Of course, *criticism* is actually a somewhat different word. *Criticism* means "judgment". If I criticize, that means I judge, I condemn. But the devil is a slanderer.

We could learn something bad about another person, and this would be no sin. But we cannot pass judgment on a person, because we don't know what is inside him, in his heart. Only God can judge a person, because He knows everything about him.

Now let's talk about the Lord's will. His will is good and perfect.

A: What do you mean by "good"?

FD: God is good. He represents the ultimate distinction between good and evil. He Himself is good. The only one who is good by nature is God.

A: How is He good?

FD: God is the source of goodness and of good. The Slavonic word for goodness, *dobro*, means "beauty". He is the source of beauty, moral beauty; hence, goodness is moral beauty. This is not just a particular set of good works that are morally acceptable, as many mistakenly think. No, goodness is moral beauty. Thus, His will is good. His will is perfect, His will is the source of good. God is meek and humble, He is love, He is purity, He is good and compassionate. And the Bible says that He is full of

loving-kindness.[2] What do you think "full of loving-kindness" means?

A: Good on the inside? Someone who does good within?

FD: No. "Full of loving-kindness" is a very subtle, very profound concept. It means that God loves people with a maternal love, caring for us as a mother for her children.

God is at once both righteous and merciful. That is why we say that truth and mercy are met in God.

A: What does *righteous* mean?

FD: God is absolutely right in all His deeds, and on the day of judgment He will show this to all without exception. We ourselves will see that God was right, and no-one will be able to object. All will see His absolute justice. We cannot say that God is a worker of evil, can we? Now, Allah works both evil and good; the Koran says so. The true God is not like this. He says: "I work only good; evil is hateful to Me."

A: And wars, cataclysms — are these good, too?

FD: They are calamities, but they are not evil. A calamity is a punishment sent not unto evil, but unto good, for correction and repentance. God is the source of good alone. God is absolutely righteous and just, and cannot possibly be bribed. As the Scriptures say, God has no respect of persons; He is unbiased. He does not accept gifts or bribes; He does not care whether a person is a king, the president, the patriarch, or a homeless person. He judges and

[2] In Church Slavonic, *blagoutroben,* from *blago-* (good) + *utroben* (of the womb or belly). — *Trans.*

recompenses each according to his deeds to the exact degree that each person deserves. There are examples of this in Scripture. King David decided that since he was king he could do whatever he wished. And he sinned — committed adultery with the wife of his military commander, whom he himself had sent away to war. David thought he would get away with it because he was the king. But a prophet came to him and said: "King, judge this case: there were two neighbors, a rich man and a poor man. The rich man had many flocks, while the poor man had but one sheep. A guest came to visit the rich man, and not wanting to diminish his own flock he went and took his poor neighbor's only sheep and slaughtered it for his friend. What do you think that man deserves? Tell me aloud." Furious, King David cried that such a man was worthy of death, and that he should restore fourfold what he had taken from the poor man. Then the prophet said: "That man is you. You did this: you were given all, yet you took all that your neighbor had away from him." The only thing that saved David was his profound repentance before God. And he was punished: Absalom, his son, rebelled against him, as God had promised, so that people would not think that God had let evil go unpunished, that He had reconciled Himself to evil. Many believe that over time God becomes reconciled to evil. Some think: That was a long time ago; it's water under the bridge. No-one even remembers, so the evil must be gone, forgotten … But evil does not go away with time: evil is washed away only by the Blood of Christ.

Church tradition says that on the day of his death a person is shown all the evil of which he is guilty and has never repented. Repentance, then, is very important. All the evil committed is washed away by baptism, and by repentance for those baptized; they need only never commit these sins of theirs again. But God is merciful. If He were otherwise, there would be no place on earth for mankind.

Many demand justice from men and from God. It is good to want justice, but righteousness is to be more greatly desired. One must want to be righteous — that is, like God.

And God's mercy is manifested in that He is truly longsuffering. In fact, everything that happens on earth is due to God's longsuffering. He endures, waiting for people to convert, that they might be saved. Why has the world's history not yet ended? Because God is waiting for people to come to Him: He is waiting for the pagan nations to come to their senses, to cease worshiping idols and come to Him. He is waiting for the apostates from God to repent and come to Him, because He does not desire the death of sinners, does not want any one of them to perish.

A: With each year the situation in the world becomes worse and worse; it's a frightening place to live. Why does God permit all this?

God has everything written: He knows everything about all that will happen to mankind and to each of us. And He knows that there are still people that may be converted, to inherit His Kingdom. And a person is more important, you see: one person saved is

more important than multitudes who perish. That one person justifies their destruction.[3]

A: So that's how it will be to the last righteous man?

FD: Yes, so it will be to the last righteous man. For example, among authors there are many pulp fiction writers, but surely you will agree that even one talented writer can justify the existence of literature as a whole. Likewise, one righteous man justifies the existence of all mankind.

But God's longsuffering is limited by justice: when God sees that a person is not changing and never will change, then God punishes. It is said: "In whatsoever things I shall find you, in these I shall judge you."[4] And this was said precisely because at the moment of death a person's fate is decided — whether he will go to God or to the devil.

A: Why do we have sinful rulers?

FD: For two reasons. The first is that the people deserve them, as a scourge that sobers people and raises them up from the earth — at least a few of them. The second reason is so that people won't think that the Kingdom of God can be built on earth. If we always have good rulers, people will forget about Heaven. They will think that we can simply create God's Kingdom here on earth. But God sends

[3] The teaching of the Orthodox Church is more aptly expressed in the paragraph that follows: one person who is saved justifies the continued existence (rather than the destruction) of many who will perish (*cf.* commentary of Blessed Theophylact of Ochrid on Mt. 13:24–30). — *Trans.*

[4] An apocryphal saying attributed to Jesus Christ. — *Trans.*

everything according to His justice, according to the merits of each person. God raises up rulers and casts them down as He sees fit and when it pleases Him.

A: Can a person make any of his own decisions in life, or does God simply do as He wills?

FD: God's will is sacred, and is manifested as providence. We know that God is the Creator of the world. He governs the world, constantly maintaining its existence, and if God were to withdraw His hand all would disappear in an instant. He is He That Is, He possesses essence in and of Himself. His very name is He That Is, and He gives being unto all. He is the life and the breath of all. He upholds all that exists and is the Lord of all history.

Many think that the devil rules the world, but this is not so. God produces good consequences from the evil that occurs through man's free will, using and transforming it unto good. But this does not make an evil thing not evil, and it is very important to remember this. Many say you can lie once in a while to bring about something good. What do you think? Is a lie justified in such cases?

A: No, lying is never justified.

FD: Can one kill an innocent person for the good of his homeland?

A: No.

FD: Correct. Evil remains evil permanently: it is a departure from the will of God. God can turn the consequences of evil to the good, but evil is never justified by the fact that God overcomes it!

A: Would you please tell us whether monasticism guarantees the monastic's righteousness?

FD: The guarantee of righteousness is God's good will. There are no others.

A: Are there monks who are sinners?

FD: Of course there are. Monasticism is a particular service, a dedication of one's life to God. But if a person has promised to serve God all his life, he will have to answer for his broken promise. Just as a person raised in the faith from childhood is more fully answerable for his sinful actions than one who has just been baptized. But the more churched one becomes, the more his responsibilities increase. To whom much is given, from him much will be required.

Despite this, however, God supports and increases every good work — even an imperfect good work, done in the world not for His sake. We know, of course, that no good work done without God is salvific. However good a person may be, he cannot be saved without God. Salvation is union with God, and good works are merely one of the conditions; they do not take the place of faith. Many think that salvation can be earned through good works. If you rack up a certain quantity of good works, you've purchased your salvation. The Catholics have a concept of "scales", common and individual. If a person has done many good works, they outweigh his sins. Thus, a good work equals repentance. If you do many good works, they go into the common pool and save another sinner. This is very convenient, of course, but it contradicts the Word of God. In actuality, salvation is union with God.

A: From what do we need to be saved?

FD: From sin and its consequences. From eternal spiritual and physical death. Physical death is overcome by the Resurrection of Christ, by His power, and spiritual death is overcome by repentance, fasting, and prayer.

Good works lead a person to finding God. In Holy Scripture there is an episode regarding the centurion Cornelius, who loved to give alms. And God sent him an angel, who said: *Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do* (Acts 10:4–6). Without God no-one would be saved. Good works by themselves, done without God, do not save, but they do lead to salvation. But when a person receives baptism, good works must be done with God, and then they will assimilate the salvation which has already been given.

We are saved not only by means of good works, however, but also through receiving the sacraments. This is why those who have not entered into union with God through the sacraments will perish. They perish through being rejected by God, when God says: "You wanted to live without Me, so go." This is how they perish.

A: Tell us, please: people say that there are different confessions, but one God. How should we interpret that?

FD: You're right in saying that there is one God, and that there are different confessions, but not all

confessions lead to the one God. Communion with God is possible if God Himself arranges that communion. The Church is the place of the Holy Spirit, Who revealed Himself on the day of Pentecost.

Now let's talk about God's feelings. We must remember that God is Love, but love is a state of will, not just of feeling. God is merciful, and this is a manifestation of feelings. Besides loving, He is also jealous, but not with a human jealousy. He does not simply accept it when someone leaves Him. His anger and fury will always pursue that person. The Scriptures contain these words: *But if ye will not hearken unto Me, and will not do all these commandments; and if ye shall despise My statutes, or if your soul abhor My judgments, so that ye will not do all My commandments, but that ye break My covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set My face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass: and your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits. And if ye walk contrary unto Me, and will not hearken unto Me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins. I will also*

send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate. And if ye will not be reformed by Me by these things, but will walk contrary unto Me; Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins. And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of My covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied. And if ye will not for all this hearken unto Me, but walk contrary unto Me; Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat. And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcases upon the carcases of your idols, and My soul shall abhor you. And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours. And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste (Lev. 26:14–33).

This, essentially, is why jealousy is a property of God. Not the passion of jealousy, but rather His desire that people not leave Him. This is why God

requires all of a person, completely. You become Christians in order to give God your whole heart: not half, not a quarter, not even ninety percent, but all of yourself. God will accept no less.

God is rest and the source of every bliss. The Russian words *Bog* — God — and *bogaty* — rich — are related, because He is all-sufficient, meaning He has need of nothing. God needs nothing from man for His own existence. Some say: I'm going to do such-and-such to God just to spite Him. Do you really think He will be worse off? No. It's like the old joke: "I'm going to burn down my own house and leave my mother-in-law's son-in-law homeless." Do think God can really be bribed?

A: No.

FD: Yet some unreasoningly think they can give something to God. They come to church, buy fat candles, and light them, thinking God will forgive them their sins for lighting such a big, fat candle. Then they go back to doing the same thing as before. But God will say: *Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these. For if ye throughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk*

after other gods whom ye know not; and come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? (Jer. 7:4–11).

No, says the Lord God, you will not be saved; I will punish you and chastise you for your deeds. And in another place, in the Book of Psalms, God says this: *The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge his people. Gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare His righteousness: for God is judge Himself. Selah. Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before Me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is Mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: And call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me. But unto*

the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare My statutes, or that thou shouldest take My covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest My words behind thee. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God (Ps. 49).

It is important to understand and remember that God cannot possibly be bribed. When we donate something to the poor, do a good deed, or light candles, we are not bribing God: we are acting according to the law of mercy, in order to be like God. We donate in order to acknowledge that everything we have been given belongs to God — that we are giving Him back His own. To whom does all the gold and silver in the world belong? To the Creator. And it is for this reason that we give alms, not in order to bribe God.

On the other hand, God is the source of all joy and stillness. It is said: *His work is honourable and glorious: and His righteousness endureth for ever. He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered: the Lord is gracious and full of compassion* (Ps. 110:3–4). God

said: *Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light* (Mt. 11:28–30).

People seek happiness and rest, but they seek it in family, in vodka, in drugs; they seek it in art, in books … and they do not find it. Can joy really be found anywhere outside God? I mean true joy. Can joy really be true joy if it ends? All joys end except for one: the joy of God Himself. And the man who strives towards this obtains eternal joy. This is the goal of the Christian life, and in this lies salvation. It consists of living the life of God Himself, of finding the source of joy in Him. A person who prays feels himself a partaker of this rest here and now. Why did the martyrs rejoice while being tortured? Not because they were fanatics; they rejoiced because the power of God was at work within them, turning those tortures into nothing. Some did not even feel the pain of the tortures, can you imagine?! The life of God so filled them to overflowing that they became founts of grace. To this day their relics work miracles. People touch the relics of a saint and are healed of the gravest diseases. And the very bodies of the saints have gone millennia untouched by decay. Why? Because the life of God filled even their bodies to overflowing, to say nothing of their souls. And this is our hope: life in God Himself, in His source of strength. This is attainable for all who are baptized, if they wish it, but not for the unbaptized. The chief means is through Communion: a person

who does not commune of the Body and Blood will never attain this.

A: Is there any way to verify miracles and healings? How can we know whether a person was really healed — whether he was sick or just pretending?

FD: Miracles and healings do occur even in our time. Before my very eyes I saw a person healed of AIDS. Everyone knows this is an incurable disease. The healing happened to a close acquaintance of mine: she was a drug addict, and became infected with AIDS. According to the medical reports the virus was definitely present in her blood. But she turned her whole life around, stopped being an addict, repented of her deeds, confessed, communed of Christ's Holy Mysteries, and her AIDS disappeared! Extensive independent testing at several hospitals confirmed that her AIDS was gone. And there have been hundreds, if not thousands, of such instances in Moscow alone. The fact is, the Orthodox Church has not lost the power of miracles to this day. But what is important for us is not the miracle itself; what is important for us is communion with God. A person can be healed, but forget God's mercy: remember how the leper and the man healed of his illness forgot to go and give thanks to the Lord. What matters to God is what is in our hearts.

A: Tell us about myrrh-streaming icons.

FD: The Lord reveals myrrh-streaming icons to this day. An icon is called "myrrh-streaming" when it begins to exude a fragrant oil. Once before my very eyes there was a mist before one icon of the Tsar-martyr, and myrrh began exuding. In another case, one of

our parishioners with his own eyes saw four drops streaming from the four corners of an icon. Frequently icons that are heavily streaming myrrh are brought to our church. The myrrh from them has filled whole vases, and people have been healed.

Let's turn now to the very heart of the mystery of Christianity. The faith of Christians is faith in God's triunity. We believe that God is not merely a Person, but a Super-person, because God is three Persons Who are One God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the mystery of mysteries, the most important in Christianity. In the name of the Trinity we receive baptism, in the name of the Trinity we receive adoption, in the name of the Trinity we receive forgiveness of sins. Why do we believe in the Trinity? Because this is what God has revealed to us. We know that unbelief in the Trinity implies unbelief in love. For example, the Muslims do not believe that God is a trinity. And they do not believe that God is love. But we believe that God is love, and hence is a trinity. God is always true and loving, and He is love, precisely because He is a trinity.

There are various attempts to logically substantiate triality. The Trinity may be compared to the disk of the sun and the rays and warmth that proceed from it. The disk of the sun symbolizes the Father, the rays of light symbolize the Son, and the warmth symbolizes the Holy Spirit. Though they are differentiated from each other, they comprise a single whole. But this is merely an illustration. Or a river, for example: it has a source, a bed, and a mouth — three components of a single whole,

which, though differentiated from each other, share a single essence. But all these are representations, to illustrate the mystery. The mystery remains a mystery. We cannot say why God is a trinity. The triality exists without any "whys". We must not think that if we can prove this, then God is a trinity, and if we cannot, He is not. He is triune in and of Himself, whether we like it or not. Many say: Stop scaring me with God's judgment; I don't believe in God anyway. We can answer: You can believe it or not, but that won't change the fact that God exists. Most frighteningly, it won't make the judgment go away, either.

The dogma of the Trinity is not a contradiction in terms. In other words, we do not say that God is three in essence and one in essence; this would be a logical contradiction. We do not say that He is three Persons and one Person; this would also be a logical contradiction. But we do know that He is a trinity: three Persons, three Selves, three Identities, and one Essence. And all three are one God, one Kingdom, one Glory, one Might, one Dominion, one Power.

And so, we believe in three Persons.

The first Person is the Father. His name is Father. What's more, as St. Cyril of Alexandria says, the name "Father" is greater than the name "God". Why? Because God is Father regardless of creation. He is the eternal Father. Can one be a father without children? Of course not. So God the Father always has the Son. It is very important to remember that the Son is begotten of the Father without a mother. Many mistakenly think that Christians

supposedly believe that He is the Father's corporeal Son — His Son according to the flesh. This is nonsense. The incorporeal Father gives birth incorporeally to the Son.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Whose other name is Logos, the Son, the Word. He is the Word of the Father. As our intellect begets itself in words, so the Father begets the Son, Who is the eternal Self-revelation of the Father. The Father is beginningless; He has no beginning. Not just in a temporal sense; temporally not one of the Divine Persons has a beginning: the Pre-eternal Father, the Pre-eternal Son, and the Pre-eternal Holy Spirit. They are all eternal. They are all holy. They are all perfect. But the Father has no beginning in the sense of origin. He is the source of being in and of Himself. He unites life within His own Self, as the Word of God says. He possesses the fullness of the Divine nature, and in begetting gives it all to the Son.

God the Son, the Word of God, is the eternal Revelation of the Father, the seal of the Father's image, the eternal icon of the Father, the effulgence of His glory, the Light shining forth from the Light. He is eternally begotten of the Father. Or is being begotten.

A: Why "is begotten" and "is being begotten"?

FD: He "is begotten" because He is always perfect: no process, no development. And He is always "being begotten" because He is eternally in the Father. In other words, He was not separated from the Father in being begotten. What happens when we are begotten? A child is born, and separates from

his mother. In God this is not the case. The Father is entirely in the Son, and the Son entirely in the Father. And He is begotten before all ages, or before all time, as stated in the Symbol of Faith: "… begotten of the Father before all ages." And His begetting is not subject to any passionate traits; it resembles the way one candle is lit from another candle. The Father begat the Son, but was not exhausted or spent. And Jesus Christ is called the Power of the Father. He is the Father's eternal glory. The Father begat this Power, but was not Himself weakened. Christ is called the Wisdom of the Father. The Father begat this Wisdom, but His Wisdom was not diminished, just as one candle is lit from another candle without extinguishing it. In the same way, Like begets Like. For this reason we say that He is "of one essence with the Father", meaning that He possesses the very same essence as God the Father. Otherwise, as Gregory the Theologian says, there would be no glory for the Father in begetting a lesser Son.

Suppose you had a daughter. Would you be happy if your daughter grew up to be just like you? And you would be disappointed if your daughter grew up to be worse than you in upbringing or development. By the same token the Heavenly Father has honor in the Son being fully equal to Him. And God the Son differs from God the Father in only one thing: His begetting, the fact that He is begotten of Him.

The three Persons of the Trinity differ one from another only in their personal attributes. It is the Father's attribute to be beginningless, unbegotten; the Son's attribute to be begotten of the Father; and

the Holy Spirit's attribute to be proceeding from God the Father. Without these attributes the Persons could not exist. There is a heresy that mingles the Persons, claiming that God is actually one Person, but in three guises. There is another heresy, one adhered to by the Jehovah's Witnesses, who say that the Son of God is a creation, but this is blasphemy against God. We know that the Son of God is the Word of the Father, and hence is naturally of one essence with the Father. Consequently, every person who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father. Why is it that we say?[5] Because they blaspheme against the Son. The Son is the Self-revelation of the Father. Salvation lies in union with the Father. Is it possible to be united with the Father without His Self-revelation? Can you learn what is on my mind without my words? In the same way you cannot learn about the Father without His Word.

True knowledge lies in being united with the person you know. You only really know a person when you share a single life together. And our task is not merely to know God theoretically; this is insufficient for salvation. We need to live a life in common with Him. And this life is bestowed by the Son.

[5] This and subsequent similar statements pertain to those who consciously reject or renounce the Christian faith (see p. 77: "… all those who rejected grace …"). The Orthodox Church does not teach unequivocally that non-Christians or Christians of other confessions will not be saved (cf. St. Thephan the Recluse, and Elder Nektary of Optina [Elder Nektary of Optina, Ivan Kontzevitch, p. 181]). – Trans.

As Christ said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me* (Jn. 14:6).

A: Is merely believing in the Son all we need to come to the Father?

FD: No. We also need to live His life. That, essentially, is why when a person does not live in the Church, when a person leaves the Church, the Body of Christ, that person has perished, though he may believe in the Son. Do you understand why other Christian confessions are not saved? They are outside communion with the Universal Church.

The Church is the reality of communion of the Holy Spirit. The Church cannot disappear, or be hidden, or reappear, or be reestablished. The Church is the Body of Christ — a reality that does not disappear. One can only be saved in the Body of Christ, because it is not the Church as an organization that saves, but Christ Himself living within it. And all of Christ is the Head of the Body, as the apostle Paul said: He is *the head of the body, the Church* (Col. 1:18).

Can we say that Christ appeared two thousand years ago?

A: Probably not, since He is from God.

FD: Correct: Christ is eternal. And this is very important to remember. Christ became a man two thousand years ago, but as a Person He has always existed. This is why Christ says: *And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own Self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was* (Jn. 17:5). He was in the glory of the Father even before the stars were lit.

His Self, His Self-awareness, was and remains divine. Having become a man, He did not cease to be God, and remained God as He always was: omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient. Hence, wherever we may be, we can hear of this. Remember: … *lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen* (Mt. 28:20).

The Symbol of Faith calls the Father "the Maker", and says of Jesus Christ: "by Whom all things were made". Through the Son the Father created the world; the Father took council with Him when He created man. The Holy Spirit likewise took council with the Son. And He not only created, but also gave the law, sent the prophets, and came Himself.

A: *The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool* — what does that mean?

FD: The Father said to the Son: *Sit Thou on My right hand.* He said: sit on My right hand as Man, not only as God. Because as God He rules with the Father always, eternally. Because He is the Power of God.

I once was talking with a Muslim in Egypt. He told me: "You're foolish; you want to be saved by a man, but Allah himself saves us." I asked him: "How would you say Allah saves you? By his power or his powerlessness?" "By his power, of course," he replied. Then I asked: "Would you say Allah's word is powerful or powerless?" "Powerful, of course," he replied. I asked again: "Would you say that God has any powers that lack the power of speech? He saves by His powerful word, does he not? And according to

the Koran, who is the Word of Allah? Do you know the answer? Jesus Christ! And yet you don't believe in Him! How can that be?" I ask. "It's written right in your book, yet you don't believe in Him?"

A: It says that in the Koran?!

FD: That's exactly what it says: Jesus is Allah's word and His spirit. And he agreed, because, indeed, it is impossible to be united to God without God. And the Lord is the only Immortal One, because He has no beginning. And that is why if a person wants to conquer death he must be united with God. God is the only Holy One, and if a person wants to conquer sin, with Whom must he be united? With God. God is also love, and if a person wants to be loving, with Whom must he be united?

A: With the Father and the Son.

FD: Not only. There is another, third Person of the Holy Trinity. We believe not only in the Father and the Son, but also in the Holy Spirit. And Who is this Holy Spirit?

A: The Holy Spirit existed from the very beginning. He is the third part of God.

FD: The third Person, not part. God is not made up of parts. The Holy Spirit is indeed the third Person of God. Naturally, He is God, equal to the Father and the Son. This is why we say: "… Who together with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified", meaning that we worship Him together with the Father and the Son. And we glorify Him together with the Father and the Son. Hence, when we say: "Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit", we bow only once, because God is One. We

bow once in the name of the One God. And we sign ourselves in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so that God's power might cleanse us through the Blood of Jesus Christ. We cross ourselves holding three fingers together, showing our faith in the Triune God, crucified on one cross. You see, our whole theology is contained in one hand.

And so, the Holy Spirit is God, and He, unlike the Son, proceeds from God the Father. The source of the Holy Spirit is also God the Father, but in another way: He proceeds from the Father. He is not the Son or the Son's brother. He is God in another way. We know that the image of the Trinity can be compared to the warmth that also proceeds from the sun, but is not a ray of sunlight, but rather comes to earth along with the rays. This is why the Son also is revealed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit reveals to us Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. This is why it is said that no-one can call Jesus Lord but the Holy Spirit alone: no-one can see His divine might, or be a participant in His divine life, except through the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to be united with the Lord, to see His Divinity, His divine power, except through the Holy Spirit. And this is why baptism is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is called the Life-creating Lord. He is the Lord of the Universe, and He rules the world together with the Father and the Son. Furthermore, we come to God in this way: the Holy Spirit leads us to the Son, and through the Son leads us to the Father. This is why the Church always sings

at Matins: "In Thy light we shall see light." In other words, in Thy Light, the Holy Spirit, we shall see the Light of the Son. Through the Spirit we come to the Son, and through the Son we come to the Father and become His children.

The Holy Spirit is called "Life-creating" because He is the source of all life: He created both vegetable life and animals, He gives life to angels and men, but most importantly He gives eternal life through the sacraments. He gives us rebirth, and He grants us new life in the sacraments of baptism, chrismation, and the Sacrament of Communion. The Holy Spirit took part in the Divine Incarnation. We know that Christ was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. He was a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And He descended to earth on the day of Pentecost and established the Church of Christ — the Church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail, which to this day remains alive despite persecutions. And the Holy Spirit will renew creation at the end of time. He is truly the Life-creating Spirit. Illumined by the Holy Spirit, the prophets and apostles spoke, and through Him the Bible was written.

Many think that the Bible was written as a letter from God, but this is not the case. The prophets and apostles did not lose their powers of reason when the Holy Spirit spoke to them, because the Spirit of God does not suppress our thoughts, but rather enlightens them. For He is the Spirit of reason, the Spirit of wisdom and meekness, and strength, and power. The Holy Spirit strengthens

the mind, making it mighty, so that a person sees what he would never have seen by himself. The prophets learned the future many centuries before its occurrence because the Spirit of God enlightened their reason.

He is the source of Divine Revelation. We know that the Church lives not by Scripture alone, but also by Tradition. There is false, human tradition, and then there is God's Tradition. The apostle Paul said: *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle* (2 Thess. 2:15).

Essentially, Tradition is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the Church itself. He manifests Himself in the feats of the holy martyrs, in the works of the holy hierarchs, in the ascetic labors of the saints, who subjugated their bodies to the Spirit, who worked numerous extraordinary miracles. And He is manifested in the Liturgy, in the dogmas of the Church, in church life. For example, we say that icons are taken from Tradition, though the Bible also says that God commanded Moses to make icons. Once again, an icon is not a testimony to the Divine Incarnation. So who is the witness to the Divine Incarnation? Who is the witness to Christ's Divinity? The Holy Spirit. This is why icons stream myrrh, and why many work miracles.

Revelation is given to us in both forms: in Scripture and in Tradition. The one does not exist without the other. Scripture is needed so as not to substitute human tradition for God's Tradition, and Tradition is needed to properly understand Scripture,

for without Holy Tradition a million different false interpretations arise.

A: Who is the Holy Spirit?

FD: The Holy Spirit is He that proceeds from God the Father, and is also God — one of the three Persons of the One God. He is the third Person of God, equal to the Father and the Son.

A: So God begat the Holy Spirit just as He did the Son?

FD: No, He brought forth the Holy Spirit in another way. Gregory the Theologian, ironically musing upon our perception, answers that we can examine how the begetting of the Son differs from the procession of the Holy Spirit; but first, he says, explain to me the Father's beginninglessness, how something can be absolutely beginningless. If you can explain this to me, he says, then I will explain the rest to you, and we'll both wind up in an insane asylum together.

We know that God the Father brought forth the Holy Spirit in another way, but we do not know in what way, just as, quite frankly, we do not know what begetting is. We know that the Father begat the Son, but we do not know how. We do know that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father differently from the Son, but we do not know how. Furthermore, it would be incorrect to use the word *begat*, because God Himself says that He brings forth the Holy Spirit.

Thus, we know that God is three Persons. We distinctly see three Selves, three Identities. But the source of Divinity is one; hence, God is also one.

Why do we not believe in three Gods? Because the source of Divinity is the Father. He is also the source of the Son and the Spirit. For this reason we have not three Gods, but one God, having His Word and the Holy Spirit. Three Personalities, each with its own qualities: the Father is unbegotten, the Son is begotten, and the Spirit proceeds. These are the three qualities that distinguish each Personality from the others; in all other respects they are exactly alike.

A: Tell us, what does it mean to be united with God?

FD: An important question, indeed! One can acquire holiness from the Holy Spirit. So what is holiness?

We know that God is incomprehensible. He says: … *there shall no man see Me, and live* (Ex. 33:20). And the apostle Paul writes: *the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; Whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to Whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen* (1 Tim. 6:15–16). And we know that the seraphim, who stand in the presence of God, hide their eyes so as not to be scorched by the leaping flame, the extreme brilliance. And it is said that God abides in darkness. This darkness arises from the overabundance of light that blinds the eyes. For this reason many say that God abides in darkness. Nonetheless, the Scriptures promise us: *Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God* (Mt. 5:8). We are promised that we shall see God face to face, that we

will know Him and be like Him, and God will come to abide in us, and God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit lives in us, enters into our hearts and lives there. The Word of God promises us this: *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known* (1 Cor. 13:12). … *I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people* (2 Cor. 6:16). And this is essentially what the Church and all the saints live by.

A: What is the explanation for this?

FD: You see, the Orthodox Church distinguishes God, God's essence, from His powers, His energies, His grace. God's essence is incommunicable and incomprehensible. Why? Because it is absolutely infinite. But God manifests Himself in fire, He manifests Himself in brilliance, in His unapproachable light, in His powers. He manifests Himself as a mighty power that enters into us. The power of God that saves us is called grace. This is an uncreated, unmade, eternal power of God that is independent of creation. God would shine and emanate from His essence regardless of creation. The Bible also calls this power the Glory of God. In this light Christ revealed Himself to the apostles on Mount Tabor, remember? They saw the glory of the Kingdom. The Lord said to His apostles: … *there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power* (Mk. 9:1). And they saw the radiant Christ, they saw the Kingdom of God. And so this is itself the Kingdom of God, the eternal Kingdom, which began

before time: the eternal radiance. And this very grace, this very power, is communicable to people.

A: What is "God's energy"?

It is God's power. In Greek it is called just that: *energia*. This has nothing to do with cosmic energy; it is superior to it. It cannot be measured. But the results of its action are quite obvious and measurable. We cannot understand how a miracle takes place, but we can verify the result. The power of God affects some from without, and others from within. From without it affects the unbaptized. There is nobody who is foreign to the power of God. If God were to withdraw His hand from us, what do you think would happen?

A: We would die.

FD: We would simply disappear! Not just die — disappear. The hand of God upholds us every instant, constantly. And this same power supports the whole universe. Blessed Benedict of Nursia once saw God shining in His glory, and how an innumerable multitude of rays emanated from Him, and our whole universe was supported on just a single one of those rays. Can you imagine the greatness of God's infinite might?! He could create an infinite multitude of other universes, and this would not diminish His power, because His power is absolutely infinite. And it is this power that enters a man through the sacraments!

In the sacrament of baptism God's power enters a person, and that person acquires the eyes to see God, because God can only be seen through God. In baptism a person puts on Christ.

In chrismation, the second sacrament, the Holy Spirit enters a person. Chrismation takes place once in a lifetime, after baptism, and grace works through it. The grace of the Holy Spirit gives a person the power to do good works pleasing to God. For not every good deed is pleasing to God: for example, a good deed done for personal gain is not pleasing to God. Or a good deed done for the sake of another person. God will not reject this kind of good deed, but it will not save the doer, precisely because the deed itself does not lead to God's grace.

The grace of God is also bestowed particularly through Holy Communion, when the Body and Blood of the Lord enter into us and make our body a part of the Body of Christ, a member of Christ's Body. We must commune as often as possible, because the power of God lives within us, and we acquire grace through good deeds done for God's sake.

How then is a person saved? Through good deeds, through the holy sacraments, through faith. If faith is absent, all good deeds are empty. And what faith must we have? Orthodox faith.

Orthodox faith is faith that "rightly glorifies God"; that is, not heretical faith, but the original, apostolic faith. The word "Orthodoxy" is actually an artificial term: even in the Symbol of Faith we do not say that we believe in the Orthodox Church. We say that we believe in the one holy catholic universal and apostolic Church. But here we refer to our faith as 'Orthodox', meaning undistorted by human innovations. The apostle Paul speaks of this plainly: *But though we, or an angel from heaven,*

preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8–9). Faith must be in God alone, pure, without any human adulterations. This is why we use the term 'Orthodox'. It means that which was handed down from the very beginning by the apostles.

Thus, faith must be Orthodox, life must be lived in the sacraments, and good deeds must be done by the power of Christ. This means asking Christ's help to do things for Christ's sake and in order to glorify Christ. First we must address God properly; lastly come proper motivation and glorification of God. Then these deeds will be done for God's sake. For example, some Protestants say that man is saved through faith alone: they contradict the New Testament, which states that we are saved by faith, but it is not written that we are saved by faith alone. We are saved by faith that manifests itself in love and good deeds. If faith does not manifest itself in love, it resembles the faith of the demons.

It is important to remember that faith and God's grace are constantly leading a person, checking to see whether he really wants to go towards God. In the Church one must never rest on one's laurels. One must not say: I've done it all; now I can rest and relax. John of the Ladder writes: "A stop on the path of salvation is the beginning of a fall." This is very important.

But the root and the heart of all good works is Communion. Without Communion nothing is possible. God Himself said: *He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me* (Jn. 6:56–57). Hence, the source of the life that God gives is Communion.

A: And how are we to receive grace?

FD: Through Communion of the Body and Blood and through confession. And then by living according to the commandments.

A: Does our Communion affect our inner state?

Absolutely. It strongly affects us, and in both directions: if a person communes unworthily, this affects him, as well.

A: What happens to a person then?

FD: He may simply die. The apostle Paul speaks of this: *For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep* (1 Cor. 11:29–30). And in our own lives similar things have happened. But when a person communes worthily, on the contrary he is filled with power and love.

Now do you understand why people cannot be saved outside the Church? It is because they do not commune, do not believe in God, have no communion with Christ, and no communion with the Holy Spirit. They remain in proud solitude, meaning that they are alone and proud of it. They say: "I have my own faith." What do you think: should a person have

his own faith, or should he have God's faith? And not just faith in God, but trust in God? Even the demons have faith in God. But Christians have trust in Him.

A: Would it be sacrilegious to ask about the risk of infection, like atypical pneumonia? Everyone using the same spoon is sure to spread disease like wildfire.

FD: But for some reason it doesn't! People were communed in times of the plague and cholera, and there was no spread of infection.

Communion is the Body and Blood of Christ, the Life-creating Savior. It heals, and in all two thousand years of Christian history there has not been a single case of disease being transmitted. Such thoughts are demonic, and the demons like nothing better than to divert people from Communion, in this case by using false hygiene. What's more, I have seen people who were squeamish about communing, yet lived amid frightful squalor at home. Here the demonic influence is obvious, since the demons are terribly afraid of Communion: they tremble and quake before it, because through it they lose their power over a person.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the Bible. Why do we consider the Bible the Word of God?

A: There were many prophets in different countries, and they wrote the Old Testament using a specific meter, in which the word "God" is repeated every 666 letters.

FD: No, the word *God* is not repeated every 666 letters. Look: *In the beginning God created the*

heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness (Gen. 1:1–4).

A: 666 is rubbish.

FD: No, it's not rubbish; it is the number of the name of the Antichrist, and it is mentioned in the Bible. Every name has a specific numeric equivalent. Anna, for instance, is 102. In all languages numbers are equivalent to letters; numbers and letters are the same thing. But once again, the number means nothing by itself: it means something when it refers to the Antichrist. That's why no-one is frightened by page 666 in the Bible, nor are we afraid of apartment or bus number 666. The number by itself is not frightening, but it does have a religious significance. A Satanist has 666 tattooed on his skin and uses bribery to get a license plate with the number 666 so that the devil will help him.

A: What about the number thirteen?

FD: That's a superstition. This number also has no meaning in and of itself.

So then, getting back to what I was saying about the Bible. Why do we believe that the Bible is the Word of God? The Church offers the following five reasons, five proofs.

The first proof that the Bible is the Word of God is that it expounds exalted dogmas that the human mind could not have invented.

The Bible speaks of triunity, which as we know is incomprehensible, extremely difficult to understand. It speaks of God creating the world out of nothing; it gives us to know that Christ is simultaneously both God and Man, which is also completely incomprehensible to human reason.

God would not waste time with empty words. In the Word of God everything is presented wondrously and soberly in the extreme. By way of comparison we might take the works of evil spirits. In fulfilling my duties as a missionary I have had to read the works of initiated magicians: they contained many capital letters, exclamation points, huge gaps in logic, and no meaning whatsoever.

The world is too infinitely complex to give a trivial explanation of its phenomena; a banal answer is of no use. There are things that are obvious to all, and there are things that are far more difficult to explain. For example, there is the matter of deliverance from sin.

A: Is it very difficult to be delivered from sin?

FD: Difficult, yes, but possible. In the Church there is an entire art of deliverance from sin. We have special medicines that are taken for this or that sin, because different sins are treated differently. And this medicine is the Word of God. The Bible pertains to every person: it holds the medicines for every human passion. Naturally, this is only if a person uses them, since it is not the Bible itself that heals, but rather life according to the Word of God.

A second indication that the Bible is the Word of God is purity of teaching.

In other words, if the Bible was given by Holy God, His Word must also be holy. Is there anything higher than the Bible's moral standard, higher than the morality of the Gospel? No. Though, you will agree, the Bible's demands are perfectly fair. For example, it is fair not only not to kill, but also not to be angry. It is fair not only not to steal, but also not to desire what belongs to another. It is fair not only not to be unfaithful to your wife, but also not to "check out" other women. You will agree that this is a fair and more pure approach to man. In this sense the Bible and the commandments differ remarkably from other books.

For example, according to the Koran and the commandments of Islam one must indeed not kill believers, but infidels may be killed. Or this: the property of believers is sacred, but not the property of infidels. The logic is strange, and it's hard to believe that this is the Word of God. Or, for example: all are permitted to have four wives and unlimited concubines, but Muhammad is permitted to have as many wives as he wishes, and no-one may ever take any of them to wife. This, of course, is perfectly understandable: the man was a womanizer and a jealous one, and didn't want his wives to ever marry anyone else. But why call it the Word of God? I draw these comparisons to make it clear that the moral level of God's Word is beyond any comparison. In Greek mythology there is a complete lack of morality of any kind. To be sure, the pagan gods

live according to their own, frequently completely immoral laws. But the Word of God is absolutely moral.

Now consider this: if the Bible were written by a man who would then have to live according to those words, would he really make rules like these for himself? Even a man of high moral sensitivities? People tend to write for themselves. But the Bible is written solely from God's point of view. It is truly the Word of God in its purist form.

The third proof that the Bible is the Word of God is the miracles worked by its authors, the prophets and apostles.

We know about this not only from the Old Testament, but from the New Testament, as well. The apostles likewise worked miracles; even the Talmud makes mention of this, warning that it is forbidden to go to Christians and apostles who heal in the name of Jesus. In other words, even their enemies said that the apostles worked miracles — miracles the like of which no-one could perform. For example, no-one can raise from the dead except the Creator.

A friend of mine wrote a text on miracles in Islam. In Islam actual miracles have occurred, but not a single instance of resurrection from the dead has been recorded. This shows by whose power the miracles were really performed. One Muslim has honestly said that only the Christians are able to raise from the dead. Miracles can be worked by two powers: the power of the enemy, or the power of God.

A: So is the enemy's power capable of healing?

FD: If the enemy has brought disease on someone, he can take it away. For example, suppose I start burning you with a soldering iron, but then take the soldering iron away. Evil spirits are well acquainted with the material world, so they can act analogously. Experience, however, shows that miracles worked by evil spirits have no healing properties. They heal one thing while crippling another. Psychic healers work in the same way: they cure a person of his addiction to alcohol, for example, but then he contracts cancer. It's not for nothing that the psychics themselves frequently become cancer victims. Many people have come to us after being "treated" by psychic healers.

The Word of God states clearly that the demons can work miracles. Demonic power exists, but there are things that the demons cannot replicate, and these are miracles of creation. For example, a demon cannot heal a person who was born blind, because one born blind has no eyes, and the eyes must be created. A demon can heal a person blinded by a cataract, just as another person can; the cataract merely needs to be removed. A demon cannot perform a true exorcism of another demon. He can replace one demon with another. Sometimes a person gets angry, then comes home and gets in a quarrel with his wife. Just then the phone rings: it's for his wife, and she takes the phone and answers sweetly, as if she hadn't been quarreling just a moment before. Why? An exchange has occurred: the demon of anger has passed the

demon of vainglory off to the person, one replacing the other. This is why even sectarians can cast out demons. One demon replaces another.

What is the hallmark of a true exorcism of demons? It is when a person begins not just to regain his health, but to show love for God. With all his might he begins to do good deeds, to fulfill the Lord's commandments, living in the Orthodox Church, the Church of Christ. This is the hallmark of the genuine action of God.

The Pentecostals drive out demons with great ceremony, with icons, and sorcerers stand with icons and crosses and call on God's name. You will not find a single sorcerer today that does not call on the name of God. But they actually act by the name of the enemy, not by the Spirit of God. They blaspheme God. They invoke God's Spirit in order to blaspheme Him, and for this the enemy helps them. Psychic healers always require that a child be baptized before they begin to work on him. Why? So that by making a mockery of baptism they might gain greater power over the person. Remember, a person who has been saved by grace sins more greatly than one who never had grace to begin with. Many magicians require that a person come to them after Communion. This is why the Lord said: *Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven* (Mt. 7:21). Not for nothing was it said, as you recall: *Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works?* (Mt. 7:22).

It was precisely about these people, about sectarians, sorcerers, and psychics, that the Lord said: … *many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many* (Mt. 24:5). Only the Spirit of God leads to the Church.

If a person begins to cast out demons in Christ's name and grows proud of this, he will naturally be punished. And no miracles will save him, one may be certain. Just because a person casts out demons by the name of Christ does not mean that he is truly casting them out. This is made known by the results, as it is said: *Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them* (Mt. 7:20).

The authors of the Bible, however, worked true miracles: miracles of resurrection from the dead, miracles of healing. That God was acting through them is obvious.

If a person says that God is acting through him, he must prove it. Addressing idolaters, God says: *Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods: yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together* (Is. 41:23). But they were unable to do anything. And Christ said: *Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works' sake* (Jn. 14:11).

For example, Muhammad began refusing to perform miracles when he was asked, while Christ performed them. There have been many people who worked miracles. For example, Seko Asakhara calls himself a miracle worker because he healed his own

"whiskey liver". But this is difficult to verify, and begs the question: how did he contract it?

A: What is the Church's view of how people pronounced clinically dead have seen a light at the end of a tunnel?

FD: The phenomenon of clinical death does exist. The Church is aware of it, but not particularly interested: it is the process of the soul's departure from the body, described in detail in the "Toll Houses of Blessed Theodora".

The fourth proof that the Bible is divinely inspired, one of the most striking, is its prophecies.

Many years before various events occurred, the Bible described in minute detail what was later to come. The best-known prophecies concern Christ. There are 333 fulfilled prophecies. The manuscripts containing these prophecies were written several centuries before the coming of Christ, and not by Christians. There it says that He would be born in Bethlehem, that He would condemn the pagan and Jewish authorities, that He would be sold for thirty pieces of silver, that He would be pierced, and numerous other prophecies, which were made and then fulfilled many centuries later.

There are prophecies concerning not only Christ, but the fate of the world in general. For example, it was foretold that Babylon, the kingdom of kingdoms, the pride of the Chaldees, would become a swamp and the habitat of hedgehogs, and would never be rebuilt. It is interesting to see a prophecy being fulfilled once again only recently. The fact is, Saddam Hussein had a colossal plan to rebuild

and restore Babylon. And it all ended in it becoming a huge swamp, inhabited by hedgehogs and numerous snakes, as was foretold by the prophets. And this was written in a time when Babylon was the world capital, like New York, or Moscow, or London.

A: Was it the demons who did it?

FD: Yes, of course it was the demons. You can go there to visit, and read the prophesy standing on the ruins, and see that everything was truly written. Or Tyre, the trade capital of the world. The prophecy was fulfilled a millennium and a half after it was pronounced. How can such precise accuracy be achieved? Is this really possible for anyone but God?

Look at the books of Nostradamus: his prophecies become prophecies only after they are fulfilled. The fact is, they are written in such a manner that they can be interpreted as one pleases, and one can construe them to have any number of meanings to suit any situation. As soon as something occurs, immediately a prophecy by Nostradamus is discovered, because a new translation comes out, giving rise to a suitable interpretation of the words, and so on. But when someone attempts to foretell something ahead of time, it ends up being very funny indeed. Not long ago I had occasion to laugh: I was reading an edition of prophecies by Nostradamus from 1991, which stated that in 1996 atomic warfare would break out in Europe, Lions would be obliterated, and Paris would be submerged beneath the sea. You can see the statistics for instances of false

prophecies when a person attempts to prophesy with the help of the demons.

In his diaries Nostradamus described how his visions took place. He writes that he would have an epileptic fit, during which fiery symbols would appear in his head. He would read them, then compare them to the stars as an astrologist, and then write his books. Who works this way? Only the enemy. Only he would make such a mockery of a creature of God. We cannot imagine a true prophet falling into convulsions on the ground, because a true prophet is illumined with the Spirit of God, and he knows what he is saying.

Finally, the fifth proof that the Bible is God's Word is how God's Word acts upon a person.

Do you know how Anthony the Great, the founder of monasticism, happened to go into the wilderness? He was on his way to his garden, and along the way decided to go into a church. There at the Liturgy, as always, they were reading the Word of God. And he heard these words: *If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me* (Mt. 16:24). Anthony immediately went out, sold his garden, gave everything to the poor, and went out into the wilderness. Just imagine how strong he must have been!

A: But he lost everything!

FD: He gained his freedom! The freedom to follow God. Or this instance: one martyr (this was not so long ago), a former Muslim, became a Christian. According to Muslim law, accepting Christianity is punishable by death; that is, any Muslim

who accepts Christianity must be killed. This happened in Turkey, where Christians were tortured, so this person was very afraid. He was accused of accepting Christianity, and he didn't know what to say in his defense. He was given time to think, and he went to God's church for comfort, as all Christians usually do. There he heard the Word of God: *Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven* (Mt. 10:32–33). And when the Turks came, he told them: "I am a Christian." Even in answer to the questions about his name and nationality he answered only this: "Christian". He was tortured for forty days straight. After being tortured he was brought to court again, where they asked: "Now will you accept Islam?" In answer he asked that his hands be unbound. The moment his hands were loosed, he signed himself with the sign of the cross. They cut off his head, and he went to Heaven. Just look how the Word of God transfigured a person! And this is not the only example. Not just the Word of God, but Church Tradition and all of church life transfigure a person.

There was one instance where a fanatic, a terrorist, a barbarian, lagged behind his army during a Muslim raid on the Byzantine empire. The army was enormous, but he was left alone. He believed that Allah wanted him to kill everyone, especially Christians and priests. Once, wanting to kill a priest, he went into a church where

the Liturgy was being served. And there he saw a flame descending upon the chalice from heaven, and there, in that chalice, he saw Christ Himself. He fell on his knees and begged God's forgiveness, told the priest who he was, and received holy baptism. Then he said that he was an evildoer, that he had taken many lives, and hence was unworthy to walk on two legs like a person, and instead would walk on all fours, like a beast. That is how greatly he repented.

This is the action of divine power, by which the Orthodox Church lives to this day. God, you see, has not fallen silent: God continues to speak.

We Orthodox Christians must read the Bible every day — the whole Bible, not just the Gospel. An Orthodox Christian that does not read God's Word at least once a day sins thereby, and must repent of this.

But we must understand the Bible as the Church and the Holy Fathers understand it. For they lived according to the Word of God, and they were the embodiment of the Gospel. Imitate them, and the Lord will be with you.

ON CREATION

FATHER DANIEL: Today we are going to talk about how our universe appeared, about where we came from, who we are, and how we wound up in our current highly disagreeable situation: that of being mortal. How did sin appear in the universe and in us? How did the universe come to be at all?

ATTENDEE: The universe was created by the Lord.

FD: So what does *created* mean? After all, there are various ideas that supposedly explain the world's origins. Some say the world has always existed; you recall that there was once a belief that the world was infinite in space and in time. This belief was formerly promoted by materialism, but has since been exhausted, as it has been proven that the world could not have always existed. This is actually obvious to any person with common sense: haven't you noticed how disorder constantly accumulates in the world? Order is far more difficult to maintain. In the world everything inclines towards chaos, towards collapse, and maintaining order requires a deliberate effort. For example, every homemaker knows from experience that her apartment won't get cleaner over time if she leaves the housework undone. Even the garden won't produce its fruits for us if left untended: it will become overgrown with weeds. This is due to the phenomenon known in physics as entropy, which we know to be original sin, operating throughout the universe. This is why

you and I, our bodies, cannot live eternally: they decay, grow old, and perish. And it's obvious that if the universe had existed for an infinite length of time, dating back an infinite number of years, it would have become disordered, transformed into chaos. According to the laws of physics, an infinite universe would eventually die a heat death. So there is no way the universe can be eternal. The universe must unavoidably come to an end. Thus, naturally, it cannot possibly be uncreated; it cannot possibly be eternal.

There are other theories, however: the theory that the world does not exist, the theory that the world exists only in our imagination — the so-called "imaginary world" theory. But these theories are, unfortunately, impracticable. There is the theory that the world is a dream of God, or that the world is a sort of illusion engendered by God. But this immediately begs the question of how God in His absolute perfection could be subject to such a flaw, such an impairment, as that of dreaming. This is obviously completely incommensurate with God.

Theories are very popular today. For instance, many people say: God is everything. These are the people who subscribe to the theory that everything is an effusion of God. It does not explain the origin of evil or good; it does not explain the origin of the world in general. How could God create something evil? This is impossible; this is absurd, foolish. Christianity, however, maintains that the world was indeed created by God. How? Certain scientific theories now say that the world naturally had

a beginning, but that it was formed by a "big bang": a sort of cosmic speck exploded, and the explosion produced stars, and then the stars just happened to explode, giving rise to planets; mold appeared on some of the planets, and the mold just happened to produce little fishes; the fishes produced crocodiles, some of the crocodiles learned to fly, and other crocodiles began crawling and walking. So goes the popular theory. In reality, however, it contradicts all logic. We look at the world around us and see no increase in complexity. We encounter no instances of an explosion producing well-constructed buildings. When new houses are built, the old ones are blown up first. Have the shards ever come together after an explosion to form a proper structure? No, obviously not. Because an explosion, like anything else irregular, only exacerbates a situation; it never improves it. Christianity never subscribes to this theory. We hold that the world has its source in a Mind — not the "cosmic mind", by any means, but super-cosmic, for God is not a part of the cosmos, but rather its Creator. We say that God created the world: in other words, the world is not God, but rather the world is the product of His creative power, the product of His plan, which serves His purposes, and is completely subject to Him.

Why did God create the world? What was the reason? If we examine this question we will learn His purpose. The fact is, the world was created, as the Church states, out of the abundance of God's love. If we were to say that it was merely out of love, we would have to say that the world was necessary for

God, that God needed the world from a psychological point of view, as some say that God needed the world for self-fulfillment. But does God have any need of this? Can perfection really be in need of anything? Then it would not be perfection anymore, and if God is not perfect then He is not God, purely by definition. This is why we say that God desired to create the world out of the abundance of His love. His love is fulfilled in Himself, because we believe that God is triune — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — and in eternity all three Persons of the Holy Trinity love each other. And Divine Glory, Divine Might, has no need of anything external, such as the world. But God wanted other rational beings to share in His love, to share in His glory, to share in His joy, in His blessedness, and for this He created the universe, created space and time, so that rational beings might voluntarily choose the path to Him, in order to became initiates of His glory. You understand that love cannot be forced. This is why God gave rational beings time to make their choice: to go toward God or away from Him. There is no third option.

The majority of people think: "There's so much evil in the world; why did God have to create evil?" God did not create evil. Evil is the rejection of God's will. God did not create this rejection Himself. Every person has the ability to refuse; this is natural, because without the ability to refuse there is no freedom. But God did not create evil itself, because evil as such does not exist in essence. Can you name anything that is evil in its essence?

A: No.

FD: Correct. What is evil in its essence? Is a knife an essentially evil object? No. Otherwise how would we slice cucumbers? Is wine evil? Again, no. And vodka is not evil, and alcohol is not evil; even narcotics are not evil. Without narcotics there would be no anesthesia. In other words, evil in essence does not exist. Evil occurs when we misuse something — for example, when we take an axe and start chopping heads instead of chopping wood. But the evil is not in the axe, even when it starts chopping heads. The evil is in us, in our evil will. This is what gives rise to the misuse, which in turn gives rise to evil — that parasite that feeds off of good.

Thus, God created rational beings that they might live and share in His blessedness. This is the world's purpose. Rational beings are not limited to people; there are other rational beings that live in the universe, as well.

A: Animals? Extraterrestrials?

FD: Animals have a certain rational capacity, but they do not possess reason or free will. I'm referring to other rational beings that have no material bodies: to spirits who have free will, reason, and senses, all more powerful that those of human beings. They are called angels. And they really do live in the universe along with us. And those angels that fell away from God do indeed appear at times in the form of extraterrestrials. They do this to delude people, to deprive them of their free will, to disfigure them.

And so God created the world. He created it, meaning that He created something other than His own Self, something of an essence other than

His own. He created it by His own will and His own power. The Church believes that God had no helpers in this. And we believe that God created the world from nothing. What does that mean, to create the world from nothing?

A: From a void.

FD: Yes, that's right. Many say that this "nothing" was a certain preexisting material, like dust, from which God created the world as though from building blocks. But there was no dust; it too was created by God. And space was also created by God, and time. In other words, the world actually has its origins in will, in the power of the will of God. There was no pre-existing material. God is not so weak and feeble as to create everything out of some sort of material. Now, you and I can make things out of materials. Though there are things that we make without any materials at all. For example, when a poet writes poetry he certainly doesn't create it out of something. God created the whole world out of nothing, and man, being created according to His image, possesses an attribute that is like Him. This is the creative power which everyone has — the power that endows us with divine might.

Thus, God is eternal, and His act of creation has no duration in time. Imagine if you and I were to find ourselves present at the third day of creation, when God created plants. Just a second ago there was nothing, the earth was bare; then an instant later plants are blooming, already in flower and bearing fruit! For there is no duration between God's decision and His execution of it. As the Bible says, God

spoke, and they came to be; He commanded, and they were created. That is, for God there is no disparity between deed and word. Only people do things that way: first we talk about something, then we think over whether to do it or not, then maybe we actually decide that we want to do it, but by then we don't have the energy. For God it is all one. Firstly, God does not lie, so it would be impossible for Him to say something and then not do it; and secondly, God is omnipotent, He can do anything He wishes, and so it is impossible for His creative power to be limited.

The Bible begins with the words: *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters* (Gen. 1:1–2). The words "in the beginning" signify the beginning of time. The universe was created along with time and space. We cannot say what existed five minutes before the world began, because those five minutes did not exist: time did not exist. This is very important. When you have many people thinking that God has lived for a billion years and will live for yet another billion, this is incorrect. God is the One Who created time itself, and all of time exists for Him already, right now. Time moves for us, but for Him it stands still, because He stands above and outside the flow of time. God knows the future in advance because for Him it is not in advance, but continual.

This is why our free actions are not determined by God simply because He knows them. He knows them, but this does not mean He determines them.

In our previous talk we discussed this in detail, but I wish to repeat it, because this question is one of the most frequently encountered: how can I be free if God knows ahead of time what choice I will make? It is because for Him it is not ahead of time. If right this minute you toss a brick into the air and it hits you in the head, you will hurt yourself, and you will start bleeding, and I will see you doing so, but this does not mean I'm forcing you to do this. These are two entirely different things.

Time appeared along with the world, and it will end when this form of the world's existence comes to an end. The world will remain, but in altered form. The current world that we see will not always exist. Firstly, because it is afflicted with death, and secondly, because it was never intended to exist forever. The world's current form — the temporary world — is a school. I don't suppose anyone, even our schoolchildren, plans on remaining in school forever. Likewise, our world as it currently exists was naturally not intended to be an eternal school. And when all its students have been educated and have finished their studies, then it too will be transfigured. It will be remade into a palace for the saved, while all those who rejected grace will be cast out into outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Further on, the Bible says that *God created the heaven and the earth.* The word "heaven" implies not so much the visible heavens that we see as it does the vast spirit world that God created in an instant and in silence. These spiritual heavens, the

spiritual dimension, encompass a vast number of rational beings. Cyril of Jerusalem once said this: "Imagine all of humanity, from the first man to the last, all without exception, several billion people. If all these people are equal to one, the angels would number ninety-nine." This is the ratio. Indeed, there are far more angels than people. And this spiritual world has a definite hierarchy, a structure. Regarding the angelic world Scripture reveals to us only as much as we need to know. We know that the angels are divided into ranks, and we know of nine different types of angel. That is, there are nine types of rational beings of which we are aware. But the Bible implies that there are other angelic worlds, as well, of which we are unaware, and they vary in their degree of proximity to God.

The closest to God are the seraphim, the cherubim, and the thrones. There are other ranks, as well, such as the dominions, authorities, powers, principalities, archangels, and angels. These beings possess intellect, will, senses, and power exceeding that of any person and even of all mankind: any of the angels would be quite capable of destroying our planet. The angels were created in a sort of "intermediate" position: they could fly toward God, or they could fly away from Him. They were created blessed, they were created powerful, and the chief occupation of the faithful angels that remain is to glorify God, to continually sing His praises, and thereby to receive blessedness. The Church likewise continually glorifies God. The fact is, you can only glorify God after you have experienced His glory.

In other words, when you praise God you are not merely praising Him, but rather you are becoming a participant in His glory. This is why God says: *them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.* One who glorifies God becomes a partaker of His glory.

Do you know what the highest form of prayer is? Ordinarily in our prayers we only ask God for things. But this is the lowest form of prayer, though naturally it, too, is acceptable to God. There is a higher form of prayer: prayer of thanksgiving, when we give thanks to God for all that He gives us, for His countless benefactions. But this, too, is not the highest form of prayer. The highest form of prayer is when we glorify God for His own sake — simply glorifying Him for all that He is, forgetting ourselves entirely. I think anyone who loves another person will understand what I mean. The highest form of love is when you forget about yourself for the sake of the one you love. And the highest form of prayer is when you forget about yourself for the sake of God Whom you love. And it is love for God that is the essence, the very heart, of Christianity.

And so the angels created by God were appointed by Him to rule over the material universe as stewards, judges. And to this day they stand at their posts: they direct the winds, which is why meteorologists often cannot predict the movements of air masses; they are responsible for the action of cosmic laws; they arrange the fates of people and of nations. The angels are protectors and guardians: there are angels who serve as guardians of particular

persons, or particular cities, and there are angels who serve as guardians of churches: in every sanctified temple an angel stands at the altar of God. And there he will stand until the end of the world, as long as the temple is not defiled by heretics. This is why we enter the temple of God with reverence, crossing ourselves and bowing even if there are no people present: because in the temple the invisible power of God Himself is at work, and His servant, His angel, is present.

Let me tell you two stories. Recently in a village where my house is located one man decided to build himself a steam bath. He went to the ruins of a church to look for suitable stones. Now, in a church the altar table — the most sacred spot — usually has a stone foundation. This man found these stones and decided they would do nicely for his bath house. He dug a hole, began removing the stones, and fell down dead. Right on the spot.

Another man who lived nearby decided to take the cross from that church to adorn his house. I had warned him many times that this was wrong, and no good would come of it, but to no avail. This story, too, ended badly: while working in his garden he fell face first on the garden row (albeit facing the cross), and died of a stroke. God is not mocked. This is an example of actions by the angel patrons of individual temples. Every baptized person has a guardian angel who protects him in all his ways. Unbaptized people do not have guardian angels. Of course, God sometimes send His angels as needed, when people ask Him to or when this is necessary to accomplish

His plans. He sends angels to protect unbaptized people also, since God's power extends to the entire universe. But the unbaptized do not have a guardian angel continually by their side. Those who are baptized, however, do have guardian angels, who actually do protect each person.

Once my wife and I were driving along the highway to Krasnodar. Large trucks are frequently encountered on this highway, and the road is a narrow two-lane highway. We were driving along at about 120 kilometers an hour. Suddenly, a car going the same speed swerved into our lane from behind an oncoming truck. It was certain death! Swerving to avoid a collision wasn't an option, either, because to our right was a deep ditch; falling into it would also have killed us. Then, suddenly, a miracle happened, as my wife told me later: she heard a voice in her head telling her to quickly swerve onto the shoulder with two wheels, while leaving two wheels on the pavement to keep the car from careening into the ditch. My wife swerved and drove on, missing the oncoming car by not more than five centimeters! It was a clear case of a guardian angel acting to protect us. This is a good example of how the angels truly do watch over our every step. For they serve God, and for them it is an honor to serve those who will be found worthy of salvation for all eternity.

The most exalted of the angels, the seraphim, are called "flaming" because they are aflame with love for God, and they set people afire with this same love. Through them God relays His commands to

people and to the angels further removed from Him, and through them He controls the universe, though He also controls it directly by His own might.

Why does He control the universe through the angels? So that the angels might have the honor of being sharers in His rule. Not because He needs them, for God has no need of anything, but rather because He desires that these rational beings might also be sharers not only in His glory, but also in His authority.

For example, why doesn't God simply deliver all people from sin? He could just go and forcibly deliver everyone. But He wants people to become true warriors, to triumph in spiritual warfare, so that He might reward them for this. Our task is to learn to fight, and not merely to fight, but to win in spiritual warfare. This is why God enjoins us to strive and to do His will, so that through this we might emerge victorious.

Of the angels there was one who was the most exalted, the most beautiful of all, named Lucifer, which means "morning star". He was the most exalted and the most beautiful of the angels, the most powerful of all, a cherubim by rank. He became so enamored of his own beauty that he decided he could be God's equal, and resolved to be as God. And this was the root of all sin: Lucifer committed the sin of pride. This is why pride is the most vile of all sins, worse even than murder. Do you see why? A person who kills out of pride is worse than a person who kills in a rage, because the proud man will kill and say he was right. The proud man sins more

greatly, because he does not acknowledge any sin on his part.

Lucifer incited a revolt in Heaven, and said this: "I will set up my throne above the heavens, above the stars, above all that there is, and will sit there, and will be like the Most High." And a third of the angels joined him in revolting against God. These angels staged a revolt in the heavens, and a spiritual war ensued, which continues to this day. Then the second highest-ranking of the angels, Michael, cried out: "Who is as God? Who is like unto God?" And with these words he flung Lucifer down from Heaven together with his angels. The angels who rebelled are called fallen angels, because they were flung down from Heaven. And now these angels abide in the firmament, that is, beneath the Heavens. It is they who call themselves the cosmic hierarchs, and their head — the cosmic mind. If you hear people talking about "the cosmic mind", remember that they are not talking about God; quite the contrary. Astrologers, for example, commune with the stars, but in reality they are communing with fallen angels, who are called exactly that: spirits of wickedness in high places. The leader of the fallen angels lost love, mercy, and meekness, but all his natural traits remained, and he was a highly intelligent, extremely powerful creature. He came to be known by another name: the devil, or Satan. The devil, in translation from the Greek, means "slanderer", "accuser". A person who slanders is a pupil of the devil, a second devil. For instance, it was said of John of the Ladder that a certain monk in

his monastery once slandered another. The saint immediately drove that monk out of the monastery, saying: "One devil is enough for me; I cannot handle two." He is also called Satan, that is, the enemy, the opponent of God, or rather of those people who serve Him. Can we say that the devil is God's opponent in the absolute sense? No, of course not, for a thing created cannot oppose God, the Creator, in any absolute sense. And the devil's power is naturally infinitely less than that of the Creator. For everything that exists does so supported by the Word of God.

But Satan is the opponent of men, the opponent of the good angels. He invented every kind of evil. He is called a murderer from the beginning, the father of lies, a slanderer, an envier, a hater of the light, the prince of darkness. And all those who do evil belong to him: they are his, falling under his "copyright". And he demands payment — namely, the soul. Everyone who does evil will give up his soul to the devil in exchange. So if you are about to do something evil, ask yourself: is this really what you want? Or is it really not such a good idea?

The angels who fell along with the Morning Star likewise came to be called evil spirits, demons. The word "demon" in Sanskrit means "one who inspires horror"; that is, a being that inspires horror and inexplicable fear. If you find yourself experiencing some groundless fear, or for no reason whatsoever some obsessive evil idea occurs to you, know that you are actually hearing the voice of an evil spirit, a demon. In the Greek, *demon* translates as

"knower". The demons know much, but they have no love. And knowledge without love kills, the atom bomb being one example.

And so the demons began to deceive, to delude people, but they have no power to force a person to do good or evil. Who do you think can make a person do good or evil? Is there any such person, or angel, or God? No. The freedom bestowed by the Creator has no limitations. But the demons are instigators. They are the original propagandists, and they incline a person to good or evil by instigation, through lies and deceit. And so we have this rule of thumb: never believe the demons, never believe the devil, never believe the thoughts that occur to you, because evil spirits can masquerade as angels. And so we have this law: to avoid being taken in by deception we must never believe any of our feelings, or trust any of our spiritual sensations, and we must consider ourselves unworthy to have any visions. There you have the basic rule for religious safety.

If someone tells you about a psychic and says: Yes, he's a healer, but he only does good — don't trust them. For any psychic will say nice things at first. No evil ever appears in its pure form, because evil is always deceptive. The devil appears as an angel of light, and his servants do likewise. For example, a sectarian comes to your house and says: "We'll give you a real Bible", or: "We'll give you health, wealth, secret knowledge" … and then they take everything you have. There are many television shows about sectarians, and I can cite many examples from my own experience where people were taken in and

ended up losing their homes, and sometimes their lives, because they believed a lie.

And so these evil, fallen spirits demand to be worshiped under the names of false gods. Those who worship idols, who worship Perun or Zeus, are actually worshiping fallen angels. It is these evil spirits that have fostered false prophecies and false religions. For example, Muhammad was deceived by an evil spirit. Recently I was reading an account of Muhammad's life, a very positive account intended for Muslims, which described in detail how Muhammad received his revelations. He would suddenly grow pale, he would begin sweating profusely, and he would experience terrible, ferocious pain. Then words would enter his head, which he would then speak. At the very outset, when a certain being first appeared to him whom he took to be the archangel Gabriel, at first he thought it was the devil. For this spirit nearly killed Muhammad: it began to choke him, demanding that he speak. This is an example of a false prophesy deceiving a person. And in our own time we see examples of this.

Unfortunately, not all psychics are fakes, which is very bad indeed. Naturally, you realize that a fake is not as bad as a real magician. A person who cheats someone out of their money is not so bad as a person who murders them outright. If someone sells you sugar instead of poison, that's not so bad, but what if it had been real poison? But the power of these angels is limited; they have no power over a person's will. They can only do what God permits them to, no more. So why does God permit their existence?

Because God does not go back on His word. He gave existence, but does not take it away, and He does not withdraw any of his promises, regardless of the choices a person makes. This is because He desires that free beings — humans, who are weaker than angels — should vanquish their stronger opponents with His help and receive great rewards. Naturally, such help from God is a tremendous honor for us. And it is God's intention that these fallen angels be routed by weaker powers, through the help of Almighty God. And so we must not say that if there were no fallen angels we would all live good lives on earth, and would not sin. In reality this depends on our free will. And according to the law of free will, if we act as God commands we have no-one to fear.

For this reason Christians do not and must not, under any circumstances, serve fallen angels, employing the services of magicians and sorcerers, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, they must not fear the evil eye, witchcraft, or any other magic powers. We fear no-one but God alone.

Evil spirits can actually influence people who do evil to others, since like attracts like. But if a person does not do evil, if he has done evil but repented of it and been cleansed by God's grace and the sacrament of repentance and Communion, then that's the end of it — that person is free. What's more, people like this send the fallen angels themselves into a panic.

Saint Sergius of Radonezh received many people possessed by fallen angels, demoniacs, who had come under demonic influence through their evil deeds. A particularly large number of those

possessed had been involved in sorcery. The demon would begin screaming and resisting, and finally, horror-stricken, would come out of the person. And to this day, the moment people like this are brought to the reliquary holding Saint Sergius' relics the demons begin to tremble and flee, because they are deathly afraid of the power of God, and they fear those in whom God's power is at work. This is why Christians must not fear fallen angels and must not serve them, but rather must wage war with them by the power of God and emerge victorious!

But let us return to the material world. And so, God created the material world in six days. This is because God wanted to appoint a particular hierarchy for the world's structure. It would have been no trouble for God to create the universe in a single instant; His hand would not have faltered. But God wanted to appoint a particular hierarchy, of which man is the apex! Man is the apex of the material world, uniting in himself the material and immaterial worlds, as well as the spirit world.

The world was created in this way: on the first day … and what was the first day of the week?

A: Sunday!

FD: Sunday, which is why we celebrate Sunday. And the week begins on Sunday — remember that! And this is why when we gather in church on Sunday we are gathering on the day the world was created, to glorify Almighty God, the Creator, Who by His might called the world out of nonexistence.

And so on the first day God created heaven and the earth. *The earth was without form, and void* — it

was not yet constructed. *And darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.* The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Holy Trinity, enlivened the water and empowered it to later bring forth living creatures. When you are being baptized, you will pray for the power of God Most High to enter into you and cleanse you, for that same Holy Spirit of God that moved upon the face of the waters to cleanse you, because the Spirit of God is accustomed to enliven water. The Spirit will hover over the waters, and clouds of smoke will rise above the waters, so that those waters might be permeated with the power of the Holy Spirit.

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day (Gen. 1:3–5). This is how instantaneously God created light, which was not yet contained in the celestial bodies. Why did this occur in this particular way? What does this mean, "God said"? God has no mouth; God is bodiless. He put forth a thought, and that thought immediately became an action. The laws of nature are the traces left by God's primordial thoughts. And this is why examining these divine traces leads us to conclude that the Creator exists. Why are miracles possible? Because the same God Who established all these laws is able to amend them, so that a person might come to believe in His existence. And so we have before us the perceptible

world, in which to this day we hear the words God spoke. God's word is not like our word: our word disappears after it is pronounced, dissolving into thin air, but the word of God remains forever. And it allows us to perceive Him even now: for example, the sun shines because God's word resounds to this day. Though our ears can't hear it, our eyes see it. And if God so wills, He has the power to withdraw His word: then there would be darkness, and all illumination would disappear. The whole world is ruled solely by these words, these divine inceptions.

And the evening and the morning were the first day (Gen. 1:5). God first appointed this rhythm, by which everything began in the evening: in the evening God created the universe, and the morning followed, when day was created. This is why the Church's worship services begin in the evening. For example, you know that working on Sunday is not permitted. This means from Saturday evening (from the start of the evening service) to Sunday evening (until the start of the evening service). Thus, working on Sunday evening is permitted, while working on Saturday evening is not.

And so God created day and night. Why does it say "the first day"? Because the first day became a kind of matrix, a full cycle, twenty-four hours: the first day of creation became the model that remains in effect to this day. There were, however, two instances when the day was changed. Once was when Joshua son of Nun was in a difficult situation, and at his prayer the sun stood still, and remained motionless

for almost a full day. The second instance was when the sun reversed its path along the horizon.

A: Did this have any impact on the calendar? Did time shift?

FD: Yes, it did. In addition to the biblical references there are numerous other sources confirming these events: the miracles are cited in various historical documents, including Greek and Egyptian sources.

And so Monday arrived. *And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day* (Gen. 1:6–8). What is this firmament? How are we to understand this word? It means "firm", "body". The firmament is a space, a cosmic space, created on the second day, and it separated out a certain part of the waters, which is beyond the bounds of our dimension. People often ask: where did the water of the Great Flood come from? As the Bible says, it came to earth from beyond the bounds of outer space — in other words, from another dimension. The water that remained beneath the firmament is the water we use each day. And so a cosmic space was created that is younger in age than the earth.

At last, Tuesday arrived, the third day. *And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear:*

and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas: and God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:9–10). The dry land rose up instantaneously. Imagine: there was the ocean, and then, all of a sudden, a huge continent appeared. The Bible speaks of a single continent. You probably know that even science now acknowledges that the earth originally had a single continent and many seas. So when the Great Flood occurred all living things were grouped together on a single continent.

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so (Gen. 1:11). In an instant the whole earth was covered with grass and flowers; bushes appeared instantly and instantly bloomed; trees appeared: apple trees, palm trees, and so on. In other words, there was no long, drawn-out process, no evolution. And all things were created according to their kind, as the Bible says.

In ancient times there were pagans, who believed that a person could turn into other animals — a bear, for example. And people would say that one tribe originated from the bears, and another from pigs, and some say to this day that they originated from monkeys. You've probably heard of these theories. Some believe they originated from garlic. And so they would worship accordingly, some worshiping garlic, others worshiping bears, others pigs. And so, in order to dispel these false teachings, God immediately says: I have created everything exactly as it

now is. The only difference is that there used to be more varieties of animals and plants, since the earth has begun to degrade since the fall. It is for this reason that many animals we know once existed are now extinct, such as the dinosaurs.

And so the whole earth was adorned in a single moment. But here the question may arise: why did plants appear before the sun? According to John Chrysostom, it was so that no-one would think that the sun produces life. The sun does not produce life, which is why the various lunar calendars usually fail to meet the expectations of those who plant by them, who generally experience a poor harvest. We must not think that the heavenly bodies rule the world: the world is ruled by the Omnipotent Creator.

After this came the fourth day, Wednesday. *And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: He made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day* (Gen. 1:14–19).

The task of the heavenly bodies is to serve man. It is not part of man's task to serve the heavenly bodies, and we have no need of any cosmic awareness, as some people say. The cosmos exist for man,

not man for the cosmos. When people attempt to acquire cosmic awareness, what do they do? They turn everything upside down: they take everything that serves us by God's command, and turn it into something they wish to serve themselves. This is a complete perversion of God's purpose.

What do these words mean, "for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years"? In one sense, a sign is something that gives a person directions of some kind. Certain signs tell us that it is time to plant: we can look at the sun and the clouds, for example, and tell whether or not we will have rain. Meteorological signs play an important role in navigation. Sometimes God sends special, unusual signs, to get people's attention or to mark special occurrences of His own. But signs are not intended to dictate a person's fate. No, a person's fate is in God's hands.

Further on we read: "for seasons". In the Bible, seasons refer to feasts, the seasons of celebration. In other words, the heavenly bodies exist in order to mark the times of these feasts. For example, Pascha is calculated according to the stars, the sun, and the moon. Thus, the heavenly bodies exist for feasts, in order to celebrate the Creator according to them, to praise the Maker.

"For days and for years" is simple: there are various days, short and long, and the heavenly bodies are fixed in order to regulate the duration of these days. Years also vary: there is the lunar year, and the solar year, and the stellar year. The heavenly bodies were fixed for all of these, as well as in order to

illumine the earth. And all the stars, the sun, and the moon appeared already luminous, and wherever they may be they always shine upon the earth.

"And God saw that it was good." What does this mean? Each time, these words are repeated in the Bible. This means that God approved of His creation, He acknowledged it as suitable to its place. It does not mean that things were bad before, but rather that He is satisfied with this world, and is admiring it.

And so the fifth day began. *And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth* (Gen. 1:20–22). The ancient Hebrew text uses the word "to swarm" — literally, word for word, "let the waters in the seas swarm with fish, and let fowl multiply in the earth". Do you see the power of the Lord's word? To this very day fish travel in enormous swarming shoals, making the very water churn! This is because fish, unlike man, heed God: the commands He gave then they continue to fulfill to this day. This, for example, is why grass and flowers bloom in the spring: the word of God resounds, and the plants heed it. In the same way fish go to spawn, and the birds fly, at this same command of God. All creation serves the

Maker. And it is said that God created the Leviathan, an enormous sea monster, that it might frolic in His presence. God delights in His creation. He is not like man, who creates and then abandons his creation. God likes His creation. It is said that "God takes pleasure in His work." God likes the world. But there are people who say that the world is bad. What does this tell us? Not that the world is bad, but rather that man's perception of the world has become skewed. And this is very important: God approves of the world, God likes the world, God has blessed the world, and the normal response for a Christian is to express joy at God's creation in His presence, and to know how to see God's hand in all of creation.

And now, at last, the sixth day arrives — Friday. *And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good* (Gen. 1:24–25). From out of the earth elephants instantly appeared, snakes crawled forth, wolves and cats ran out, frogs jumped out — in an instant the whole earth was swarming like a living ball of yarn.

And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in

His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Gen. 1:26–28). Thus, God blessed His creation and said: be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.

Reading on: *And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day* (Gen. 1:29–31). Originally God gave man as food the fruits of trees and green herbs, and to the beasts God gave grass for food. So there was not the struggle for existence we have now, this devouring of one another that we now see, this fight for survival that so horribly, hideously stains the world. This whole struggle arose due to the fall into sin and the revolt against God.

Now let us discuss man in detail. From the Bible we know that when the seventh day began, God blessed it: *And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made* (Gen. 2:3). *And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was*

very good (Gen. 1:31). God approved of all His creation. And at last the seventh day arrived, and God rested from all His works and blessed that day. This is why that day is called the day of rest — in the Hebrew, *shabbat,* or the Sabbath. This Hebrew word means "rest", because God rested from His works.

From this moment on God does not create anything fundamentally new, until the moment of the Divine Incarnation, when the New Adam appeared. The Divine Incarnation marks the beginning of a new work of creation, which continues for every person in the sacrament of baptism.

God rules the world: to this day He is the true Master of the Universe, He is the Almighty One, He steers the ship of the world, He commands nations, tribes, languages, plants, animals, stars, and galaxies; all is under the shelter of God. God's power has not waned. Without His will not one bird falls to the ground, as the Bible says. Even the hair that falls from your head does so because God so desired. Everything is absolutely in His hands. But He has created nothing new, because He created the world for life.

See how God created everything: each time He would say something and do it instantly. But when man was created, counsel was taken. To whom did He say: *Let Us make … in Our image, after Our likeness*? To the Holy Spirit and to His Son. Thus, man was to be created in the image and likeness of God, but the Bible says that he was actually created in God's image. All of us are created in God's image; that is, we have within us something that makes

us similar to God. God is rational, and man possesses reason; God is free, and man possesses freedom and will; God has senses, and man likewise possesses them; God has power over the universe, and this same power is given to man; God can create, and man can create; God is a Person, and we too are persons. This is what we have within us according to the image of God. God possesses the Word, and the Word of God is Christ. Man also has the power of speech: this is what sets him apart from all other animals and living beings on earth. Furthermore, thanks to his properties and his ability to rule over the universe, man is closer to God's image than the angels, though the angels resemble God more greatly in their nature, being spirits. Man has an immortal soul that enlivens his mortal body, and it too is created in the image of God.

But what is this likeness? The likeness of God is resemblance to Him in His life — His moral life. God is love, this we know from Holy Scripture; hence, a person who loves, truly loves, becomes like unto God. God is mercy, and a person who is merciful becomes like unto God. God is meekness, and a meek person also becomes like unto God. The Lord is humble, and the humble person becomes like unto God. God's likeness lies in each person's ability to eventually come to resemble God not only in his nature, but also in his will. But this will not happen immediately, since man's God-likeness is achieved over time and in cooperation with God. And this is the chief goal of God the Maker: man, created in His image, must acquire His likeness.

The Church Fathers say that the image of God is Christ, which is why He became incarnate: to restore the image we lost, in which we were created. And His likeness is the Holy Spirit, Who leads us to perfection. However, the Bible goes on to say that God created them as man and woman. If we turn to the Greek or Hebrew original text, we see the more coarse wording: *male and female He created them.* This was written in order to show that the division into genders — male and female — is not an indication of God-likeness, so that we might not think that gender exists in God. God is neither man nor woman. God is above all gender distinctions, and so we ought not to think that there is a division into two genders in God. The Holy Fathers say that God's division of man into two genders was included in our nature in anticipation of the fall into sin, because God stands above time, and He knows how man will abuse his free will. God includes a trait common to animals — division into two genders — in man's makeup, as well, to prevent the extinction of the human race, so that human history might continue, so that man might continue his existence. But God's image is imprinted on men and women alike.

And so there was the sixth day. Further on, chapter two of Genesis describes man's creation in detail. There it says: *These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, and every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and*

there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (Gen. 2: 4–7).

The human body is taken from dust, from ordinary earthly dust, and we should not think this is meant figuratively. In confirmation of this, after man's fall we see that God says: *for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return* (Gen. 3:19). Unfortunately, such is the case. Everything within a man turns to dust in a very literal sense. And so God created the human body out of dust, so that man might not grow proud, so that the moment he began to grow proud, and to say: "My, how great and powerful is man, after all, subduing the whole universe!" — he would realize that he is created of dirt, and would gaze upon his own body and be humbled. The body is given to man for humility, as a reminder that he is by no means the master of the world.

But it is also said that God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. What does *breath* mean here? It means that by the Spirit of God the Creator placed in him a soul, created out of nonexistence; like God, resembling Him, created in the image of God, having a similarity to God, proceeding directly from God's mouth, though not from His essence (because the soul is not God's essence, but rather His creation). But since it was placed by God's breath it possesses a unique quality by nature: immortality, given by God through grace. God endowed it with indestructibility. The human soul is indestructible,

unlike the mortal body. But remember that man is a union of soul and body. The body is not man's shell, as many incorrectly think. The body is part of the human personality — a lower part, to be sure, but a part. And for this reason we know that until man is completely and fully restored, until man is resurrected, the saints, for example, will not attain the fullness of blessedness. Our task is deification; that is, uniting the whole man, soul and body, with God.

Thus, the newly-created man possessed terrific physical strength and spiritual might. The full spectrum of life came alive within him. Vegetable life, for he grew and could multiply like a plant. He possessed animal life, having senses and mobility. He possessed angelic life, having intellect and power like the angels. Finally, he had within him divine life, by virtue of his natural immortality. Fire could not burn him, water could not drown him, and no power in the world could do him harm. In addition, he possessed a tremendous intellect.

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him (Gen. 2:18). *And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field* (Gen. 2:19–20). Could you give names to every living creature? Adam did, and the names he gave perfectly expressed their essence!

With his gaze he delved deep into each creature and named it according to its essence. To give a name is also a sign of a person's power over other living creatures.

And God led Adam into a beautiful garden, from which a river flowed, which divided into four rivers: the Euphrates, the Nile, the Tigris, and the Ganges. In this beautiful garden grew wonderful plants, and Adam was to till and take care of it, and this garden was called the garden of paradise, paradise in Eden. There were many beautiful stones in the garden, and gold, but this was of lesser importance. In the center of the garden there was a special place where two trees grew: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A person who ate of the fruit of the tree of life would become immortal; he would never disappear, would never die, since through this tree he became united with God. But immortality lay not in the tree itself, but rather in what proceeded from it, through which man could be united with God. Man's union with God had to occur through a material object — a tree and its fruits — because as man had a material body it was necessary that divinity likewise be imparted to that material. For example, when we are baptized we do not merely say that we believe, and that's all there is to it: we must also be immersed in water, so that our body might be sanctified, and so that our soul might be transfigured by the Holy Spirit.

But there was a second tree growing there, as well. This was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. *And the Lord God commanded the man, saying,*

Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:16–17). Why is the knowledge of good and evil a bad thing? To understand this we first need to find out what the word *knowledge* means.

Even in modern Russian this word has two meanings. The first is to know a particular bit of information. The second meaning is to learn about someone's life, to strive to emulate it. To really know a person you have to live in harmony with him, to begin living a single life with that person, and to live with him a fairly long time. One who seeks to know good and evil begins sharing his life with both good and evil. But can one really live a single life with evil? Yes, but that life will be infected. Furthermore, if the man had tasted of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (as he did, unfortunately) he would have begun deciding what was good for him and what was evil. But man cannot decide this: only God can decide what is good and what is evil. Man does not have the intellect God possesses, and Truth is not man, but rather God, with Whom is all good.

Having tasted of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, man might have appointed himself God's "deputy". And this is why God says, "Thou shalt surely die": because death consists of man's separation from God. Originally man's mind was intended to live according to God, his will and senses were to live according to his mind, and his body was to live with the aid of the will and the senses, while

the material world would have received immortality through the human body. There is an old expression, "to live on the Holy Spirit", and this aptly expresses man's original purpose. But with the fall into sin that hierarchy collapsed.

And so, when Adam had named all the beasts, none had been found that resembled him. God was perfectly aware of this. The beasts are not really our four-legged brothers and sisters, are they? They are our subjects, but not our brothers and sisters. For our brothers and sisters would be of one essence with us. The beasts are not of one essence with us: they are our subordinates, and we must care for them, but not worship them, and not consider them our ancestors.

And then God brought a deep sleep upon the man, as it says in the Russian translation. The original text reads that God "put the man into a trance" — that is, the man felt nothing, but saw everything. *And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man* (Gen. 2:21–22). Why do you think God took a rib specifically?

A: The rib isn't the most important part of the body; you can get along just fine without it.

FD: That's not the point. The rib is closest to the heart, because the wife was to the husband as the rib is to the heart. God took a rib from near the heart so that the woman and help meet would be an intimate part of the man. And so He made the woman

out of a rib. God did not make the woman from dust, as He did Adam, because He wanted all people to be kinsmen, from a single origin, growing from a single root.

And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of [her] Man (Gen. 2:23). Here we see a play on words in the Hebrew: she is called *isha* because she was taken from *ish*, because she was created to be a helper to the man — an equal helper, as she was originally, but a helper. Such is her place.

Originally all obeyed the words of the Creator. We recall that each word of the Creator becomes a law of God, a natural law. For example, it was said that it is not good for man to be alone. A person is melancholy when alone, because God's word is at work: it has not gone away, and remains to this day. And so a person ought not to be alone. But what about monks, you ask? Despite their outward solitary existence, monks are not alone, but with God. Marriage, too, is a God-pleasing thing, for marriage was established by God in Paradise, and God established it by the mouth of Adam.

Further on we read: … *This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of [her] Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they [two] shall be one flesh* (Gen. 2:23–24). These words are the basis for marriage, and this is why it is said that *what therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder* (Mt. 19:6). This is why the wife is the person closest to the husband,

and the husband to the wife: because they are a single entity. This is a commandment, the word of God Almighty. If a person breaks up a family, he will incur the severest retribution for disobeying the word of God, and experience has shown that this retribution is swift in coming, and does not delay.

And so it is said: *and they [two] shall be one flesh* (Gen. 2:24). These words mean not only that a person who enters into marriage has been united to his other half: the man and woman become a single entity, one flesh. But remember: these words pertain not only to the husband and the wife, but also to any person who has sexual relations with another person. This means that a person who has relations with a prostitute becomes one flesh with her. And not only with her, but with everyone who has had sexual relations with her. You end up with a huge lump, a body or flesh of some kind, but certainly not the body of Christ. This is not a temple; this is an anti-temple. This is where the old expression "to cornute"[6] comes from: these are the horns of the devil, which lure a person to his death. And so, flee fornication. The Bible literally says exactly this: "flee", run away, in the literal sense of the word. *Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body* (1 Cor. 6:18). From the start he abuses this blessing of the Creator.

Further on the Bible says: *And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed*

[6] *Archaic:* to cuckold; literally, "to give horns" to one's spouse, meaning to commit adultery. — *Trans.*

(Gen. 2:25). Their sinless nature had no reason for shame; sin and shame were unknown to it. Why are animals not ashamed? The nature of animals has not suffered any internal disturbance: they ended up in places and states unsuited to them due to Adam and Eve's fall into sin, but their nature itself was not damaged. Man was damaged, and his nature disturbed; thus, our clothes are an indication of the disturbance in our nature. Prior to the fall man was clothed in uncreated light: he shone, being permeated with the grace of God, like Christ shining on Tabor. In this same way man shone before the fall into sin. He was clothed in a garment of brilliance, and after the Resurrection his clothes will fall from him. As John Chrysostom says, they act foolishly who clothe corpses in luxurious apparel, because these clothes will rot regardless, without benefiting them in the least. At the resurrection people will likewise be clothed either in garments of light or in garments of shame.

Now we will discuss the original sin of our progenitors. Each person inherits original sin and its consequences at the moment of conception. Furthermore, we will soon see just how existential the situation that arose over seven thousand years ago remains for us today.

Adam and Even lived in Paradise, and into Paradise crept the serpent. The serpent, the Bible tells us, was the most crafty of all beings, and Lucifer, the chief of the fallen angels, entered into it. *Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman,*

Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die (Gen. 3:1–3). The first mistake Eve made consisted of not going to ask her husband. After all, they were a single entity, and here she tore herself away from him. Secondly, she entered into a conversation with the devil. When an evil thought comes to us we must not start entertaining it, yet here Eve entered into conversation with one. And so the devil came instigating his provocative ideas, for he is truly an instigator and a very smooth operator.

A person may say, for example: I have honest doubts about Christianity. All doubts generally come from without. And for some reason the person believes that the thoughts or words he hears are his own doubts. The only reason the person comes to this conclusion is that these thoughts leave him baffled by asking the most foolish questions; this is enough for him to consider them his own doubts. But these are not doubts: they are provocations, to which we succumb. There are real doubts that proceed from lack of knowledge, and then there are those that come from the provocative questions put by the devil.

The devil begins everything with slander, with questioning God's justice. And instead of going to her husband and telling him that some stranger is asking her questions, the woman engages in

conversation with him and, furthermore, attempts to change her tempter's mind.

We know that it is useless to try to change the devil's mind. This is because after their fall into sin the fallen angels lost the ability to repent! And they never will repent, because they do not wish to. They have made their choice. If they had repented immediately God would have accepted them, but they do not wish to repent. This is why we must not argue with these thoughts: they will confuse you regardless, because the devil's mind is more powerful than that of man.

Eve answers the tempter: *We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die*. But did God actually say: "Ye shall not touch the tree"? No, He did not say that. Eve added that herself. Can one add anything of their own to God's word? No! In addition to Eve being the first feminist — a true, classic feminist, thinking: "I'll handle this all by myself, without my husband" — she is also self-willed, and even the first heretic, adding her own ideas to God's words.

In this sin we see all the sins of the world wrapped up into the single episode of the first fall into sin like a bouquet of flowers, germinating the terrible seed of death, corruption, and decay.

And so the serpent saw that he could influence the woman, that he had caught her attention, and he proceeded to blatant slander, to a blatant attack, saying: *Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know*

that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:4–5). He switches to slander, saying: "Look, God was envious of you; that's why He forbade you to eat of the fruits of the tree." Here we have a clear case of slander, which is why the devil is called "the slanderer". There is a very simple answer to these words of his: if He were envious, why did He make us?!

Incidentally, note that the serpent's words contained a half-truth. We will see later that the eyes of the first people were opened, and they became like gods, knowing good and evil, determining for themselves what was good or bad for them. You know, there is one very important fact of life, aptly expressed in a quote from a certain English author. Clive Staples Lewis once made a clear, very important and very acute observation: "Every person gets what he wants out of life. But not everyone is happy about it afterward." Can you imagine what it would be like if all our wishes were suddenly granted? We would all find ourselves amid piles of all kinds of stuff, surrounded by heaps of dead bodies. Yet at times a person is beset by the desire to have all his wishes granted. And then what happens?

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat (Gen. 3:6). These are frightful words. As unpleasant as it may be, let's examine them carefully. How did it all begin? Eve

believed the serpent, and disbelieved God, because she wanted to, you see? Not because she was convinced that the serpent was right, but because she wanted to. In other words, at that moment Eve began fantasizing. Remember, man was not originally intended to fantasize. Fantasy is the result of the mind's dissolution; man ought to see things as they actually are. And here is Eve, wanting to have things her way instead of God's way. She wanted to decide everything for herself. And what happened? She looked at the tree, and Holy Scripture says that she saw "that the tree was good for food". In other words, she wanted to experience pleasure independent of God. In our own time, too, we encounter people who want to be independent of God: drug addicts, drunkards, gluttons, voluptuaries. We might say that Eve was the first glutton. The apostle John the Theologian says that everything on earth — not in the material world, but in the world of human relations without God — is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world* (1 Jn. 2:16).

The first to conquer Eve was the lust of the flesh: I want pleasure, no matter what the consequences. In other words, I'm going to experience pleasure now, and I don't care what happens later. This was Eve's attitude. I want pleasure: even if it ruins everything, even if I die the next day or right on the spot, I'm going to have my pleasure

now. Incidentally, this is the logical result: pleasure that bypasses God kills, and the person literally dies.

Further on, we read "that it was pleasant to the eyes". Eve decided that there is beauty independent of God. You know, there are people who say: "I'm attractive, so I must be right," but they're sinning nonetheless. There is a legend about the wife of the Spartan king Menelaus, Helen, who caused a terrible conflict. A bloody war was waged for ten years, wreaking desolation, all because the beautiful Helen had run away with the son of the king of Troy, Paris. And people look at her and say: "Oh, she's so beautiful! She can't possibly have been wrong; she's just so lovely." This is the lust of the eyes: when a person believes that there can be beauty independent of God. For example, a lover of the visual arts, of literature, or of film loves beauty that is independent of God, and continues to love it even if that art depicts debauchery or Satanism.

Thirdly and finally, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. We read: "and a tree to be desired to make one wise". I want to know, and everything else can go to pieces, everything else can rot, as long as I get to know. This is lust for power. I was once told the story of how the atom bomb was created. There were two possible ways events could have played out: one possibility was that the atomic breakdown would prove impossible to stop, and would take all the planet's atoms along with it, while the other possibility was that the radioactive breakdown would be stopped by the graphite core. Yet the scientists

went ahead with the experiment regardless! For they desired knowledge, and knowledge makes men mad. Furthermore, man needs knowledge in order to rule, to command. I want power, I need might, power, knowledge … all this bears a strong resemblance to the devil's motto: I want knowledge, for knowledge is power. It's not for nothing that the fallen angels are called demons — "knowers". This is why the tree is called "a tree to be desired": because it gives knowledge, but a knowledge independent of God, a knowledge independent of Truth. The person who has been made mad by knowledge says: "Even if there is a God, it doesn't matter to me: what matters is that I have might and power." This passion, which John the Theologian calls the pride of life, is a mortal sin. People who have knowledge that is independent of God have the world within their grasp: a person full of this kind of knowledge is capable of trampling all others underfoot in his quest for power.

You see, all this was contained in a single glance: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Eve compounded this by taking action: she stretched out her hand and ate the fruit: *she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat*. So greatly possessed was she by these passions! All the sins of our world come together in that first sin: fornication, and murder, and theft, and gluttony, and rebellion. Theft was indeed committed, for she stole what was not hers. And fornication, since man departed from God and went to the serpent. And direct rebellion, and pride,

and hatred, and lies, etc. — in short, all the world's sins in a single act.

And she *gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.* This is a very interesting passage, a paradox: the helper giving an order to the head. Adam is caught between two conflicting desires. On the one hand, he thinks, if the woman has done it, why can't I? You know, to be sociable, as they say. The worst catastrophes and crimes are committed by groups of people, by crowds. Why? Just to be sociable. On the other hand, Adam loves Eve, his wife, and prefers love for his wife to love for God. When faced with a choice between love for one's wife and love for God, what ought one to choose?

A: God.

FD: God. Look what Adam does next: he immediately lays all the blame on Eve. He made the wrong choice, and behold the price: first the man acted out of love for God, then out of love for his wife, and she ends up beginning to hate him. When love is not established in Truth, when it is built on a lie, it inevitably destroys a person, just as it destroyed the first people.

Most horrible of all are the deep-seated reasons for Adam's act. He did not sin out of audacity; he did not think: "I'll do it anyway, I want to do it, I want fulfillment, to achieve my full potential." Achieve it he did — he ate the forbidden fruit. But the real reason was that he did not fear God and did not trust Him: he thought that nothing would happen to him, and that he would become a god.

And so the eyes of both were opened, as they were promised, and what do you think they saw? *And they knew that they were naked.* You see, as it turned out, what they saw was not what they had wanted. They had wanted to see themselves gods, and instead saw that they were naked, because the grace of God had departed from them and their chastity had crumbled. Something frightful had happened: their mind had turned away from God and had begun to feed off the emotions, off the feelings. The feelings and the will departed from God and fell to pieces. The mind dissolved into fantasies, illusions. Today a great number of people prefer to live in an illusory world; they don't see what is real. The will has disintegrated, and man has lost all willpower: he doesn't know what to choose, he vacillates between reason and fantastic ideas, and doesn't know where to turn: he doesn't know the Truth. The will is weakened: man now has many different wills that tear him, yanking him in different directions. Man is beset by conflicting feelings: man loves what he ought to hate, and hates what he ought to love. Indeed, man has become darkened, and passion has appeared. Man has begun to boil with the passions and the malice that have filled his nature. The body has escaped the control of the will and the feelings, and consequently man has fallen under the influence of corruption and begun to experience sickness. Multitudinous illnesses have appeared, leading to death, and ultimately through man death enters, bursting in upon the universe, and all the universe has now become infected with death. And this destruction

begins to affect animals, and plants, and even the stars. The fall into sin, the rupture of man's union with God, has resulted in the simultaneous dissolution of the entire world.

And they knew that they were naked, and that the world had become a foreign place for them. Originally the whole world was obedient to God, but the first people proved disobedient. Picture a machine designed to work a particular way, with all the cogs turning one direction, and then suddenly one cog in this enormous machine starts turning the other way. Obviously, the whole machine will break. The same thing happened with man: he went against God's will, and began to perish, to break down, and the whole world along with him.

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons (Gen. 3:7). And so they sewed fig leaves for themselves and made themselves aprons, giving rise to the figurative use of the term "fig leaf".

And they wanted to hide from God! *And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden* (Gen. 3:8). In this way they attempted to take cover, to conceal their shame, which before they had not even seen. They now had a sense of shame, which they had not had before, because shame results from pangs of conscience. But God was not slow to show mercy: He attempted to appeal to Adam's conscience, to prompt him to

repentance. *And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself* (Gen. 3:9–10). Observe what is happening: Adam has begun hiding in the bushes from God! From the omnipresent and all-knowing God! This remains a popular error to this day. How do people usually react in our time when they are surprised in some inappropriate act? First, if they see no-one is going to confront them, they act as if nothing has happened. Secondly, if someone does criticize their behavior, they begin either denying it, or shifting the blame to others, or simply making excuses, citing the circumstances. Likewise, when a child has done something naughty he goes and hides under the bed. Everything that happened in the Garden of Eden formed a false, viscous circle, one in which man runs around like a hamster in a wheel. And man cannot break free of this terrible rut. God asks him, calling to him: Adam, where are you? What have you gone and done? And Adam tries to deceive the omniscient God. Oh, nothing, he says; I just heard Your voice in the garden and was afraid, because I'm naked, so I hid.

Then God asks Adam directly: *And He said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?* (Gen. 3:11). God is awaiting repentance, waiting for Adam to ask His pardon! In other words, if Adam had asked forgiveness then, the whole history of the human race would have unfolded very differently. But what did he do? He did just what people

do today. Asking forgiveness is the hardest thing a person can do. And so Adam naturally begins making excuses and shifting the blame to someone else.

And the man said, The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat (Gen. 3:12). So whose fault does that make this? Firstly, God's, because He gave Adam a wife who would do such a thing. Secondly, the woman is at fault. It wasn't Adam's fault at all; he's a good boy, he is. Have you ever seen this happen? It's everybody's fault but mine. And even Adam, God's wonderful creation and the first man, did the same thing. Then God, seeing it was useless to remonstrate, addressed the woman.

And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? (Gen. 3:13.) And what did the woman say? "Forgive me"? No. She said this: *The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat* (Gen. 3:13). I was tricked, you see; it wasn't my fault.

Ordinarily people justify their actions by the circumstances in which they found themselves, under which they supposedly could not have done otherwise. Sometimes women say: "I was forced to have an abortion." Excuse me; what do you mean, "forced"? Were you grabbed and tied hand and foot, forcibly drugged, and dragged off to the hospital? Or people say: "I was forced to break the fast." Were you attacked by robbers who held a gun to your head and shoved a sausage in your mouth, may I ask? No. These people were "forced" in the same way that Eve was.

But God sees that these people do not want to repent. What does God do then? God then takes extreme measures: He punishes. *And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel* (Gen. 3:14–15). God is speaking not to the serpent, but to the devil within him: So you wanted to set your throne higher than the stars? Well, now you will crawl on the ground and eat all kinds of filth, feeding on the kind of putridity fit for a creature like you. Furthermore, I will not allow you to hold counsel with men. You will be always at war with people, but will never be victorious; you will never come to an agreement with them. For example, the people who attempt to come to an agreement with the devil are never successful: the devil always cheats them. This is because from the very beginning God put enmity between men and the devil. True is the Word of God! Furthermore, God promised that at the end of time the seed of a woman, that is, born of a woman alone, without the participation of a man, will crush the serpent's head, destroying all his power. "And thou shalt bruise his heel" — that is, although the devil may be able to do some harm to the One born of a woman without participation of a man, that One will destroy him. Who is this person born solely of a woman, without the participation of a man?

A: Christ.

FD: Yes, Christ, Who destroyed the devil's power, his might.

And so, *Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee* (Gen. 3:16). This is precisely how the woman was cursed. Firstly, she will experience sickness during pregnancy — morning sickness. Secondly, she will give birth to children in great pain. And thirdly: You wanted to be superior to your husband; now he will rule over you. Indeed, before the coming of Christ woman were enslaved, and outside Christianity remain so to this day. In these nations men treat woman like slaves, the result of God's curse in the Garden of Eden. And this curse is lifted only by the redemption, because the new Virgin, the Virgin Mary, has set right the crime of the ancient tree, and for this reason in our time women must be treated with respect in the Church.

Finally, we read: *And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return* (Gen. 3:17–19). And so, first: Because of you the earth which I gave

you, over which you were appointed the master, is cursed; I will rain down curses upon it because of you. It will serve you no longer, but will decay; it will be subject to the law of corruption. No longer will you be able to work lightly; labor will never bring you joy, because your work will cause you sorrow. Furthermore, the earth of your body will produce passions and bring forth sicknesses. The curse concerns not only the earth in the sense of the soil, but also the body, which was created of dust: it, too, will bring forth thorns and thistles. Gregory the Theologian says that after the fall into sin our soul became a "corpse-bearer". Every person knows that the longer he lives, the more worn-out his body becomes: man's decay begins at birth. The longer a person lives, the more greatly his soul is weighed down, and his body becomes heavier. In old age this is especially visible: when we need to think about the soul, the body is ill, hindering the soul, rebelling. In youth also it rebels: the person wants to think, but his hormones are raging. This terrible phenomenon is the direct result of the body escaping from the soul's control.

And all this will continue until you return to the earth from which you were taken, because *dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.* In other words, you will die; your body will turn to dust. But Scripture says not that you will return partly to the earth; no, it says you will return entirely to the earth. So what about the soul? Where does the soul go? It too goes into the earth, into the depths of the earth. A man's soul descends into Hades — a place

of despair and endless longing, a place of darkness, a place of hopelessness, a place where souls abides in consciousness, but devoid of hope. And this path was the only path for all men, regardless of individual qualities: all souls went to Hades, until the time of Christ's redemption. And this place exists to this day for all unbaptized people. This path, unfortunately, is the original path for all mankind. Such was God's Word, and such was the curse placed upon man.

And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living (Gen. 3:20). He called his wife Eve, which means the progenitress of life.

In other words, previously Eve was not separate from Adam, and although they were different personalities they were one whole; hence, she was simply called "woman". Now, however, she received a name, like an animal. And she became the mother of all living, from whom all of us were born.

Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them. And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of Us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the Garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life (Gen: 3:21–24).

And so God clothes Adam and Eve in clothes of skins. This refers not merely to animal hides given

to them for clothing, or to the physical covering of the skin: this means that God placed a boundary between Adam and the spirit world. Whereas before Adam could naturally and directly communicate with the Angels, this he could do no longer. God had set a boundary: "coats of skins". Today man does not normally communicate with the angels. This is a preventive measure, for our own good, because with whom do you think man would communicate now if he were to leave his body and enter the spirit world? With fallen angels, of course. This is why God set a boundary and forbade it to be passed. But occasionally there are people whose garments of skin are removed: they are stretched thin by drugs, alcohol, magic, and the practices of Eastern religions, and the person begins entering the spirit world, often losing his mind as a result. And here's what is interesting: in talking with alcoholics (for many years I regularly visited a chemical dependency treatment center) they all described exactly the same things in relating what they had seen while delirious: little green demons and the like. And the reason why they all have the same hallucinations is that they are seeing the same reality: they are seeing the fallen spirits who are abusing them. And this is why the Lord limits passage into the spirit world, and does not allow a person to enter there.

Then God says: Adam has now become like one of us; he decides for himself what is good and evil for him. We must make sure he does not stretch out his hand to the tree of life and live forever. Why? Why shouldn't a cursed person live forever? Imagine, if

you will, an immortal Hitler, or an immortal Stalin. You would end up with a fantastic villain like Koschei the Deathless. This would be hell. In other words, man would become a demon, a demon incarnate, in the most literal sense, incapable of remorse. Death leads many people to remorse. It's not for nothing that the majority of people, as is well known, come to the Church due to illness or sorrow. A person's sorrows are something sent by God to sober him. If it were not for death, God would have a hard time bringing a person to remorse. Death is very effective at sobering a person, because death is the antidote a person needs to break free of evil.

Gregory of Nissa says this: imagine that you have a beautiful clay pitcher, and someone has poured it full of lead. What should you do? The owner of the pitcher does this: he breaks the pitcher, throws away the lead, and glues the pitcher back together. God does the same: He breaks the body, throws away death, then restores the person on the day of Resurrection. And this, incidentally, is why we must remember that it is the body that died that will be resurrected, not some other body; there is no transmigration of the soul from one body to another. A person resurrects in the same body in which he was born and died, since the human body, being a part of his personality, must also participate in salvation.

Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the Garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming

sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life (Gen. 3:23–24). And this is why, no matter how hard people may try to achieve eternal life on earth, they will never succeed. The most recent attempt, currently underway — cloning — has also fortunately failed. It turns out that cloned animals die earlier than their parents: old age sets in early on. Any attempts of man to live forever on earth are doomed to failure. The path to the tree of life is closed: the fiery angel, the cherubim, stands to this day at the gates of paradise, and no-one but those who know the secret path can enter.

What is this secret path? And where did it come from? How can we get into paradise? Through the secret path of baptism and life in Christ and by Christ! Baptism is not merely a rite; it is the discovery of the secret path. But naturally one must actually walk it, progressing along this inner path. If one is baptized and continues to not live a Christian life, instead of the path to paradise one may find oneself on the path to hell, flippantly confident: Now I'm baptized, so that means I'm saved; I don't have to do anything more or worry about anything else from now on. One can lose one's salvation that way; this you know perfectly well.

From there on the history of mankind continues thus. Adam had children; the first son, Cain, killed the second, Abel; and the descendants of the first son created a civilization advanced in technology and magic. Adam's third son was Seth: he produced a race of men that began to serve God, but they too became corrupt. They began to take wives

from among the daughters of the race of Cain. Then, finally, the time came when all humanity had become corrupt, except for eight people — the family of the righteous Noah — and God sent the Great Flood upon the earth. Only those eight people faithful to God were saved. In this way God showed that the number of people who sin does not matter to Him in the least. No matter how many people do evil, there is no way they can ever justify their evil through sheer numbers. So bear in mind that rationalizations such as "everyone does it" will be of no use.

After that, the descendants of the surviving eight people multiplied. All men, who were one family, with one language, made a mutual decision to build a tower, so as to be equal with God, to ensure their safety from God, to make contact with the fallen spirits. In what city did this happen? In what city was the tower being built?

A: In Babylon.

FD: In Babylon. And God said: *Go to, let Us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech* (Gen. 11:7). And God scattered them over all the earth. People departed further and further from God, and so the human nation fell into degradation. Humanity progressed technologically, but their connection with God disintegrated: people began to forget God, though occasionally they would remember that at one time they had worshiped the Creator. But God is on high, and the people found themselves gods a bit closer to home: the fallen angels themselves.

People began worshiping the fallen angels, worshiping pieces of wood and stones; they began worshiping trees, animals, and images they had made themselves. Today we see this happening universally; degradation is constantly on the rise.

But throughout all this God did not desert humanity. He raised up for Himself a new nation, which He charged from the start with preserving the Revelation. This nation was taken from the sole righteous man: from Abraham. Later his descendants followed, who came to be called the Hebrew people, and upon them God's Revelation was imposed. Why "imposed"? Because they did not want it in the least. And at every opportunity that presented itself they attempted to kill the prophets. Man did not want this Revelation; God did. Despite this, God sent the prophets, and the prophets spoke of the salvation which would proceed from the house of David. God sent righteous men, who by their pious lives strove to please Him. It was their labors that led to the appearance of the person whom God had so long sought, in whose person was gathered all the very best that mankind had to offer. A person who would give her heart to Him completely. And at last the day came when this person was born. What was this person named?

A: Mary.

FD: The Most-holy Virgin Mary, the first and only person to give herself up entirely to God. And true to His word, God became a man, to recall the hapless fallen descendants of Adam. God took pity on man and did not leave him to perish.

And so this is our brief history of mankind. Though it concerns our whole life, as well. Remember, we talked about the first few days, but you see that all the rest boils down to these days: everything originated in those first days. The first people, unfortunately, determined everything. If they had rejected sin then, they would have become godlike beings, there would be no death, and they would have become impervious to sin, like the angels, who rejected Lucifer's proposal and now will never fall. But this opportunity, alas, has been lost, and we need a second Adam, whom we will discuss next time — Christ. We will talk next time about Christ our Savior, about the Divine Incarnation, about how the Redemption was accomplished, about how death was conquered, about how man was made worthy of eternal life and the Heavenly Kingdom, and about what awaits us at the end of the world.

That is all I wished to say to you.

ON THE MYSTERY OF THE DIVINE INCARNATION

FATHER DANIEL: Today we will be talking about the very heart of our faith, the second-most important mystery for Christians: the mystery of the Divine Incarnation.

The most important mystery for Christians is the faith that God is triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity one in essence and indivisible, as He appeared at the Baptism in the Jordan. And so we believe that He is love, because He is the triune God. This we discussed in our first talk.

Today we will talk about the second-most important mystery for Christians: the mystery of the Divine Incarnation. For we believe that Christ is our foremost Hope, the Way leading to the Father. But often the question arises: Who is Christ? When the Lord asked His disciples this question, He asked: "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" Well, how would you answer that question?

ATTENDEE: God the Father sent us His Son; the Son of God saves us from our sins.

FD: Very good. This is very important, because some people think otherwise. Many people believe that Christ was merely a messenger, a teacher who said lofty things about goodness, a teacher of morality. But this is not so. The fact is, the Lord did not present Himself as a teacher of morality. In the Gospel Christ made a very concise demand. When asked who He was, He responded: *Even the same that*

I said unto you from the beginning (Jn. 8, 25). He said: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am* (Jn. 8, 58). He said: *O Father, glorify thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was* (Jn. 17:5).

Why then exactly was He given the name Jesus? The name Jesus literally means "Savior". Savior, because as the Gospel says: ... *and thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins* (Mt. 1:21). And indeed, this very word *Savior* presupposes that man needs to be saved, primarily from sin. Does a person really need salvation, anyway?

A: Yes, he does.

FD: Yet many people say: we can do anything we like on our own; no-one shall deliver us. Remember the Soviet hymn: "Neither God, nor Tsar, nor hero; by our own hand will we free ourselves"? The favorite anthem of atheists. But man does need salvation nonetheless. Any person, even one who does not believe in God, knows that one thing is certain — so certain that many prefer not to think about it. That one thing is death. Can man be saved from death through his own efforts? No. Who, then, can save from death? Can one man save another from death? One person cannot save another from death. What about, say, an angel? Could a created bodiless spirit save a person from death?

A: An angel can save a person by his intercessions.

FD: No, he cannot. Do you know why? Because an angel is a created being: it has a beginning, and whatever has a beginning can have an end. So,

naturally, whatever has a beginning, such as an angel, cannot deliver man from death. In the same way, of course, the enemy, the devil, cannot deliver man from death. Besides, the devil is a murderer, hates people, and wants to kill everyone. Far be it from him to save a person.

And so we find that no-one on earth can deliver a person from death, except for the One Who created man from the beginning. This is very important! Why is the dogma of creation considered one of the most important dogmas in Christianity? Because if man was not created by the One True God, and instead, say, descended from monkeys (there are people, you know, who think that man descended from monkeys; such nonsense is even taught in schools), then there is no reason for God to save him: man is not God's, he is not God's creation. To God He is a foreign, unnecessary creature.

But the Church believes, and not only believes, but knows for certain, from her own experience, that God is the Almighty Creator, and that He created all of man, both soul and body. This is very important, because many people believe that the soul is the whole man, and the body is a shell. Such talk is quite popular today, and this leads to the following conclusion, for instance: whatever you may do with your body, your soul can still be good. Here's how this is popularly interpreted: I may cheat on my wife or husband with my body, but in my soul I am always true to them. Naturally, this is self-delusion, and it has no bearing whatsoever on the truth. God is the Creator both of man's soul and of his body. Only

the Creator Himself can come and save man. This occurs in wondrous manner: the Son of Truth, the Effulgence of the Father and the eternal Self-revelation of the Father, becomes Man. But God was not obligated to save men. He simply took pity on them. In His love for men God sends His Son, His eternal Self-revelation, into the world, to strengthen people with uncreated divine might. Who can conquer death? Only the One Immortal by nature. Only the One Who is without beginning can conquer death. Who can deliver and redeem us from sin? Only the One Who is holy. Only He can burn away the roots of sin. Who can lift the curse? Only the One Who imposed it. For God justly cursed the devil, and justice demands that evil be cursed. And cursed it was. And God Himself alone can deliver man from punishment.

A truly wonderful miracle occurs: God becomes Man so that He might raise Man up to Himself, so that man might become a godlike being, so that he might become a god by grace. And in this lies the essence of Christianity: that man does not merely become good, he becomes holy. You yourselves are being baptized to become holy. There is no point in being baptized for any lesser purpose! Christ came in order to make people holy, godlike beings. One woman said to me: "I want to be baptized so that all will be well with my son." Now I ask you, how can someone be baptized so that all will be well with their son? That's like taking a diamond and using it to drive a nail. The two things are incommensurate.

The Lord comes to earth. But how does He come? Naturally, we know that the Lord did no violence to the human will to make people godlike — or rather, to restore to them God's image; they would have yet to become godlike. And part of that image of God is that man has free will. Without free will there can be no love, no friendship — nothing. But God created man so that he would love Him and live in His love. And for this reason for five and a half millennia the Lord sought a person who could give Him his whole heart. He sought him and sought him, but did not find him. He reared His people and for five and a half millennia sought a person who would love Him more than anything on earth. Whoever loves most, that person is closest to God. And in the end one person was found who loved God with all her heart and soul: the Virgin Mary, the fairest of all the daughters of men, the very heart of the human race, the sole unsullied flower to bloom on the tree of mankind. And the Bible contains these wondrous words: *As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters* (Song of Sol. 2:2). Imagine: a vast field of burdocks, brambles, and thistles … and among these weeds blossom lilies of magnificent beauty. So it was with the Virgin Mary: she blossomed forth in the dirty, thorny field of mankind — an unblemished, most beautiful, most pure Virgin. For her will had chosen God from infancy, and she had desired this since early childhood.

But this did not happen by chance. In her were united, as it were, all the virtues of bygone

generations. The fact is, virtues likewise do not remain confined within a single person: they, too, are passed on. We know that one person's sin affects the next person. For example, a person gets drunk, gets into his car, and hits another person. It doesn't matter that the other person did not sin; the consequences of the sin affect his life, as well. The same with virtues: they too invariably have an influence on others. It's not for nothing that people say the apple doesn't fall far from the apple tree. For example, if a family lives by Christian laws, seeking God, the children will be better protected, and it will be easier for them to become holy than for children from a family where people get drunk, fornicate, or hate others. The atmosphere in the family affects the children; virtue "infects" a person.

From the seed which the Lord nurtured over many millennia sprang forth the Most-pure Virgin Mary. And then one day the Angel Gabriel appeared to her and said: *Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women* (Lk. 1:28). Mary was amazed, and wondered what kind of strange greeting this was. Then the angel said to her: ... *thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end* (Lk. 1:30–33). And the Virgin Mary answers: *How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?* (Lk. 1:34).

Why does she say this? Because she was a virgin, and she had taken a vow of perpetual virginity. It is said of her that the Virgin Mary was the first nun in the history of the world. Many people think that monks are a dark, gloomy lot … but the truth is, if you look at our monks you will rarely see a gloomy one. They are very cheerful, our monks, and visibly so: there are far more cheerful monks than there are married people. As one acquainted with both ways of life I can vouch for this, because monasticism does indeed draw a person closer to God.

And so the Virgin Mary, the first nun, says: How can I bear a son, being a virgin? And the angel answers her: *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God* (Lk. 1:35), meaning: I do not know how this will happen; this is a mystery that no tongue can express. But I know who will make this mystery a reality: the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High. That is, the Holy Spirit and Christ Himself! He is the natural power of the Father. The apostle Paul speaks of *Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God* (1 Cor. 1:24). By what power did God create the world? By Christ, His Word — that same Word Who was in the beginning, by Whom the world was made.

And so this Power overshadows the Virgin Mary, and Itself, by Its own Power, creates for Itself a body.

But here the whole fate of the world hung by a thread. God could have become a man, or He could

not have. On what did this depend? On the free will of the Virgin Mary. And she said: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her* (Lk. 1:38). And the Word became flesh. God the Son entered into her womb in a mystical, miraculous way, creating His own Personality. He created His own human nature. He created for Himself a body from her blood, created for Himself a soul, and He became a true Man, while yet remaining true God.

The process of creation took place as at the beginning of the world. God said then: Let there be light — and there was light. Let there be a firmament — and there was a firmament. He said: Let there be ... and the world appeared. And now the one and only moment had arrived when man could say to God: "Let it be." And this the Virgin Mary says to God: Let it be! And at this word God becomes Man. For God always heeds man: He seeks his will, and He seeks for his will to be obedient to Him.

Thus was accomplished the greatest of all mysteries: the Divine Incarnation. The Virgin Mary carried her child, like any other mother, for nine months, and gave birth to Him in a town called Bethlehem, which translates as "house of bread".

Amazing, isn't it? Even the town's name is actually providential. For this, the Church says, was the house where the Bread was baked of which we partake in Communion.

Here I must digress a bit, and say a little about the significance of the Divine Incarnation for men.

You see, there existed three barriers between God and men. The first barrier was a difference in nature. Can we, with our limited, weak, infirm human nature, break through time and space? No. Can we fathom eternity with our minds? No. In other words, we are incapable of breaking through to God. The difference between the natures of God and man hinder us. Furthermore, when people in the Old Testament saw God they were in fear and trembling. To this day the Jews rock back and forth while praying, recalling God's manifestation on Sinai. When the people beheld God, they were in fear and trembling: they shook with terror, though they were not even seeing God Himself, but only His manifestation, His glory. At this glory Mount Sinai and many mountains around it began to smoke and to melt, to dissolve. I was on Sinai, and there you can actually see petrified lava flows. The whole mountain was molten, and was as though saturated with bolts of lightning. Furthermore, the whole mountain is etched with "burning bushes", as though drawn by the hand of God Himself.

In other words, at the sight of God man began to tremble. We often think that God is a little like Santa Clause: just ask, and He'll give you whatever you want, He's so nice; and He won't ask for anything in return. This is how people imagine God: as a kind-hearted little old man. The fact is, nothing could be further from the true God than this perception. When people saw God they were in fear and trembling; they were in terror. When Moses wanted to see the face of God, God said to him: *Thou canst*

not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live (Ex. 33:20). Why? Because of the extraordinary light of His divine face. The blazing fire, the exceeding radiance, the exceeding might and power of the Divinity could consume a man if he were to approach Him unprepared. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; this is very important. Not a buddy-buddy relationship with God, in which there is no wisdom and much foolishness, but specifically fear of the Lord!

But a second wall stood between God and man: the wall of sin. Could the just, righteous Creator have reconciled Himself to sin? All evil must be punished. Any person knows this, even an atheist or a nominal believer. Even the envious cries of the communists, demanding to know why the rich flourish and the poor suffer, proceed from perversions of the righteous concept that evil must be punished. Perversions, because in fact this is merely envy, but based on a righteous concept nonetheless.

Alas, punishment is unavoidable. Sin must be redeemed. Man himself cannot redeem, or ransom, himself. Imagine this: you are held in slavery, a hostage. How can you ransom yourself? Whatever you may earn belongs to the tyrant who holds you prisoner. Without help from outside you can do nothing: you need someone to ransom you.

The barrier of sin had to be overcome so that people could come to God. A ransom had to be brought for the people; the innocent had to die for the guilty. Only in this way could the guilty gain their freedom.

The third barrier standing between God and men was the barrier of death. Even if a person encounters the Immortal God, even if he communes with Him and makes peace with Him, but then dies, and his soul is forever separated from his body, communion with God will become impossible. How can a mortal commune with the Eternal God? Yet it was for this that God created man. And so the third barrier had to be destroyed: someone had to destroy death. And it had to be destroyed justly, demolished from within.

Christ comes for this purpose. And in His incarnation He destroys the first wall that stood between God and men: the wall of their disparate natures. He did not merely become man in form; He became man for real, a true man, with a soul as we have, a mind, will, and senses as we have. His body was exactly the same as we have, and He felt pain, and tiredness, and hunger. In short, He was real, ordinary man, with one exception: in Him there was no sin. For His body was God's own Body, and His soul was God's own Soul. He had a single hypostasis, a single Personality, the Personality of God the Word — the second Person of God. It is very important to remember that in God there are three Persons, three Selves, as we recall. Thus, He was the eternal Son of the eternal God the Father. If you read the Gospel attentively, you may notice something remarkable. He says: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am* (Jn. 8:58). In other words, He is superior to time.

Yet He also says: *Father, save Me from this hour* (Jn. 12, 27). Naturally, He says this as a man. For this reason we see that His Personality has come to belong both to the Divinity and to humanity.

It is remarkable that out of all existing human personalities there emerged a single personality of God, the Son of God, who became man. And in this Personality exists human nature, without dissolution, without comingling, without changing, and without separating forevermore from the divine nature. God has become a Man for all time, and in Him there exist two natures: the divine and the human. And each nature exists consistently with itself, which is why we confess in Christ the two natures inherent in Him.

Thus, in Christ the wall of separation between God and man is overcome. Now, in uniting with Christ we can be united with God. He has become like a conductor, in the fullest sense of the word. In Him, two unwaning natures have been united. If in Christ the human nature had been swallowed up, would we be able to unite with God? No, of course not. Rather, in uniting with God we would burn up like moths in a fire. For example, the Hindus say that if you meet God you will dissolve into Him: your personality will cease to exist, because the chief goal of the Hindu is to destroy his own personality.

There was a heresy, one very popular today, which taught that people exist with God severally. There is a belief that in Christ there were two personalities: there was the man Jesus, and God the Word abode in

Him. As God abode in the temple or in the Old Testament prophets, so God abode in Christ. Is this kind of union possible between God and man? No, this would be merely a meeting, nothing more: there would be no connection, no union. No unity would be possible without destruction — merely a meeting. Just as Moses met God, died, and departed, though he was a righteous man, the meekest of all men living on earth at that time.

And so it was before Christ: people met and departed, wept, waited for Him, hoped in Him … and only after He had walked that path Himself were they able to come out from thence, out of the depths of hell. Incidentally, look at the chief danger facing modern civilizations, especially in the West. People want to be people without God: I am my own master, I make my own rules. People say: I will decide for myself what is good or evil for me. This is based on an incorrect concept of Christ. Why is it that people cannot remain indifferent to Christ? If a person reads the Gospel attentively, it rouses in him either a terrible hatred or, on the contrary, love. But I have never met anyone who was indifferent to Christ. If a person sincerely begins to read the Gospel he will not remain indifferent to it. Here there are two types of people, divided into two camps. I have seen people who tore the Gospel up afterwards in hatred, and spat at the icons, because they realized that they could not go back to the lifestyle they had lived before, living in the same complacency; they did not want to change, but understood that they could not manage without God, and

hated Him for it. Others, on the contrary, loved God and joyfully received His Good News. For Christ is truly the Stone, the Head of the Corner, over which many stumble and fall.

And so the chief error of modern Western civilization and our own much-suffering Russia lies in that people want to be people without God, but a person only truly becomes a person when he is united with God. This is that for which he was intended, and this is his mission. When a person starts living without God, it always ends badly.

The truth is, all our chief problems come from improper teaching about Christ. It is no accident that the Church spent the first millennium fighting for the mystery of Christ's incarnation. Even the icon: what is its significance? We will never agree with the Protestants, who claim that one must not venerate icons, for failing to venerate the icons would mean that Christ cannot be depicted, and if He cannot be depicted, He is not a Man, and if He is not a Man, that's it — the road to God is closed! For us the icon is of the utmost importance. For us it is a door, a door into eternity, a door to victory over the curse, a door to victory over sin.

Christ becomes true man. He is born of the Most-pure Virgin Mary in a cave used as a stable. Can you imagine? In a stable! The King of kings, He Who even in His humanity ought to be the Ruler of Israel, is given what place? A stable! No other was found. And so Christ is laid in a manger, a feed trough for animals. This manger is preserved in Rome to this day — the manger of Christ, a small

trough. Indeed, to this day the Church marvels, astounded at the mystery of the Divine Incarnation. We all know the beautiful Nativity hymns sung at the church service; they are a model of the finest poetry. And in the hymns we hear, among others, the following words: what can be more humble than a stable — a cave stable? What can be more humble than a manger for livestock? Yet therein lies a treasure, therein the uncontainable is contained. This is an astounding mystery!

The Church has never tried to downplay the mystery of Christ; it has never said that this is something normal, something ordinary. No, the Church has only preached at all times and to all men that the only extraordinary thing in the world is Christ, the most uncommon of all innovations.

What do you think: is the New Testament out of date? People today say that a book written two thousand years ago cannot help but become outdated. But the New Testament has not become outdated! It is actually surprising that every time people try to produce something more up-to-date than the New Testament, it turns out to be a rehashing of moldy old pagan fables. Christ is the sole Innovation. The only new thing under the sun is the Divine Incarnation, when God descends from the heights, becoming Man. He descends without changing place, of course, because God is omnipresent, and manifests Himself on earth just as He manifested Himself before to the angels.

And so the wise men and shepherds come to Christ to worship Him. The wise men were

astrologers, Persian kings, as the ancient Church sings; watchers of the stars, pagans who superstitiously worshiped the celestial bodies and whom the star teaches to worship God, to cease their astrology, and to become Christians. Many people use the star of Bethlehem for other purposes, but no, it was a star that taught people not to worship the stars and divine the future by them, but rather to worship the God-man! Not just God, but the God-man — God become a Man. This is true worship. You and I do not worship the stars. It is not the stars, but the Almighty and Loving God Who guides us. And this we were taught by the wise men, the former astrologers, who brought gifts to the Infant Christ: gold as to a King, frankincense as to God, and myrrh as to One Who was to die, as to a future dead man. He was likewise worshipped by the shepherds to whom the Lord's angels appeared, proclaiming joy to them. They said: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men* (Lk. 2:14). Peace had finally come to earth, and good will had appeared among men. Peace had come among men and angels, among men and God.

Do you think the angels rejoiced, looking upon men prior to Christ's coming? No. I think even now the angels look upon us and are not particularly happy. It cannot please the angels to see people fornicating, killing each other … Just imagine, in Russia three million people are killed each year — people killing their own children! Three million a year! Herod did the same with the children in Bethlehem. This kind of mass wickedness has always existed.

But people had sunk into a still greater madness: idol worship. For God, murder is a lesser madness than the greatest madness of all: idol worship, worshiping a creation instead of the Creator. From God's viewpoint there is no greater madness than this. It is very important to remember this, because many people say that we need to respect the sensitivities of idolaters. But God calls this the greatest abomination a man can commit: offering a creation the worship due only to the Creator. And this will consequently lead to fornication, and murder, and all the other sins.

And so, after this Herod attempts to kill Christ. But following a revelation from an angel Christ is taken away into Egypt, and there, in the pagan temples, the idols fall, and the graven images crumble, because in the idols lived and still live evil spirits, the princes of darkness.

Later, after the death of Herod, Christ returns to Nazareth, to a town in northern Galilee, and lives there for thirty years. We know of only two episodes from this period in His life: the first, when He is brought to the temple on the fortieth day after His birth, and there is met by the ancient elder Symeon, who predicts: *Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;* (*Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also*), *that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed* (Lk. 2:34–35).

In other words, from the very beginning the Lord shows that Christ is not someone Who will delight everyone. The elder Symeon immediately warns

that by desiring to become Christians you are entering a particular camp, a camp at war. The whole world, by and large, is divided into two camps: the first camp is the forces of God, the Universal Orthodox Church, while the second is those who serve the prince of this world, the prince of darkness, the devil. Bear in mind that if you enter the first military camp you will have to fight, and you will have to win. You will be given the power and the abilities to do this. Only one thing is required of you: to fight. Your reward will be the Eternal Kingdom with Christ. I tell you this beforehand so that you will have no illusions that a Christian is just a humble, tolerant, yielding person. No! Christianity is war, right from the start. But the implements of this war are not physical implements. Christianity wages war on a deeper, more challenging level: it wages war for men's souls.

After all, what is true, Christian love? It is actually a terrible feeling — extraordinarily terrible in its beauty and power. This is no earthly love; this is the supernatural Love that leads to God.

And so Symeon addresses the Infant Himself, saying: *Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace*. To an infant forty days old he says: You are the Lord of life and death. Amazing! But he knows that this is indeed the Lord of life and death, Who promises to him resurrection. *Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel*

(Lk. 2:29–32). All of us here are of the Gentiles; there are probably no Jews here among us. "The glory of Thy people Israel" — this means that He, Christ, is the glory of the Hebrew nation.

The second episode from the first thirty years of Christ's life is when at the age of twelve He was brought to the temple of God, and there Jesus revealed His wisdom, so that all the teachers present were amazed at His answers. They were amazed that He knew the Holy Scriptures without having been taught.

In this way He lived in Nazareth for thirty years. He was in obedience to the Virgin Mary and to His supposed father, the righteous Joseph the Betrothed, and learned the carpenter's trade. And He *increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man* (Lk. 2:52).

What is most remarkable is that in these thirty years, and throughout His whole life, He did not commit the slightest sin. And no lie was found in His mouth, as witnessed not by His friends, who could have prevaricated somewhat, but by His enemies, the bitterest of enemies, who could accuse Him of nothing. And what better testimony than that of an enemy? In this sense nothing could be better.

Finally, when He turned thirty, God sent John the Baptist, John the Forerunner. What do you think *forerunner* means? One who runs on before. That is, he ran on before to prepare the way for Christ. The Baptist said: *Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* (Mt. 3:2). What do think this means, "repent ye"?

A: Something like to be sorry for all the sins you've committed, to acknowledge them, then to break with the past and begin a new life.

FD: Exactly right. To break not only with one's sins, but with one's whole past life; that is, to reexamine one's entire life, to turn one's life around. Baptism includes this kind of repentance. After baptism you must begin to live anew. You enter the font specifically in order to live a new life. Prepare for this now; it is for this that the time of preparation for baptism is given: so that you can reexamine your life. We have read the Gospel together in order for you to reexamine your lives through the Gospel, thinking through and reconsidering them, in order to run after Christ, towards holiness, upon emerging from the baptismal font. What is most remarkable is that after any person emerges from the font, as he is being tonsured cruciformly, the words pronounced are: "bless Thou this infant". That is, even if you are baptized as an adult you will become an infant. For the moment of baptism marks the beginning of a person's true life — the theandric life.

And so many people flocked to John, and he baptized them in the Jordan. According to tradition this took place as follows: he would lead a person into the water up to his neck, and tell him to list his sins aloud and repent of them. Being a prophet, he knew whether or not a person was speaking the truth. Then, when the person had finished confessing all his sins, he would submerge him into the water. And

the person would emerge renewed, repentant, prepared for the coming of Christ.

Among the all the others, at last Jesus Himself came to the Jordan to be baptized of John. John says: *I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?* (Mt. 3:14.) In other words, I need Your baptism, yet You come to me? He sees the radiance of the Divinity above Him, he sees the secret fire slumbering within Him. Jesus says: *Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness* (Mt. 3:15).

Jesus fulfilled the whole law; He fulfilled all the rules of the Old Testament. What does this mean, "fulfilled"? Not just finished, not just carried out, but brought to completion. For the Old Testament has not ended for us: we read the Old Testament as our own Book, but for us it has been surpassed by the Gospel.

And Jesus went down into the water, then immediately came out of the water. When He entered the waters of the Jordan they were dark, in a spiritual sense. Just imagine how much evil, hatred, murder, enmity, idolatry, sorcery, and fornication were there — every kind of impurity! Jesus cleanses this water, transfusing it with His brilliance, and preparing it so that we might all receive holy baptism.

He came out of the water, and immediately the Heavens were opened. At what moment do you suppose they had been closed? When were the Heavens closed to men?

A: When Adam and Eve sinned.

FD: Right. And why were they closed? What does "closed" mean? The devil and all his angels occupied the road to the Heavens. Indeed, the aerial realm was seized by evil spirits, and there was no road there whatsoever. The demons seized people and drew them all down into Hades. And now the Heavens were opened again when Jesus came out of the water, paving the road to the Heavens.

And now, as of the moment of the Lord's baptism, followed by His crucifixion and Resurrection, a path to Heaven has appeared — a new, secret path. New because it did not exist previously, and secret because many fail to notice it. People walk around the church and do not wish to enter. They are afraid: afraid of change, afraid to change their heart.

And John saw the Spirit of God descending upon Jesus like a dove. Why like a dove? The dove is a symbol of purity and meekness, a symbol of peace. When the Great Flood ended, God gave this sign: a dove came with an olive twig in her beak — the famous "dove of peace" comes from this Old Testament account. In the descent of the Spirit of God as a dove God showed that the time for reconciliation had come: the Great Flood of sin and death was over. And God the Father proclaimed: *This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased* (Mt. 3:17).

Thus, in the Jordan for the first time, not in shadows, not in symbols, not in mystical prophetic predictions, but completely openly, the entire Holy Trinity was made manifest. Hence, this day is called Theophany. Incidentally, what does "beloved Son"

mean? It means the Son, the Son of His love, the Son who does not contend with His Father, as we unfortunately see today; not a rebel, but the Son of the Father's love. And, furthermore, the only Son in Whom true love is to be found.

Many seek love. Everyone wants to find true love. But true love is possible only in the Beloved Son. Many seek the path to becoming good — man has an inherent desire to be good — but they do not find it, because they do not seek these paths in the Son of God. The Father's good pleasure may be found only in the Son, as the Father Himself said.

After this, lead by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus immediately goes into the wilderness. And who inhabits the wilderness? The devil. He goes to encounter the devil directly. Jesus fasts for forty days. We also have Great Lent, the Holy Quadragesima, and imitating Christ the Savior we fast for forty days. But Christ's fast is not our easy, unburdensome fast. Some groan: "Oh, it's so hard to fast! How am I going to live without meat or milk?" Christ fasted a strict fast, meaning that He ate nothing and drank nothing for forty days. And naturally He wanted to eat, and became terribly hungry, as any ordinary man would, for He was fully human.

The devil comes to Christ. He comes to Him from without. He could not act from within, for there was no place within Jesus upon which the devil could have acted. For Christ did not indulge in fantasies. Ordinarily the devil acts on us through our fancy. In Christ there was no such faculty of fantasy, because He had in Himself an incorrupt nature, the very

same nature that came from the hands of the Father, though with the consequences of sin, which He voluntarily took upon Himself.

And this is why the devil comes to Him from without, and proffers to Him the first temptation. He says: If You are the Son of God, say for these stones to become loaves of bread. But Jesus answers: *Man shall not live by bread alone* …— by what, then? — … *but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God* (Mt. 4:4).

Why do I mention this now? Because many people remember the first half, and forget the second. Often on television people say that man does not live by bread alone, and it turns out that what they mean is that man *does* live by, say, the theater. Experience has shown that the theater sometimes proves a place of mass destruction. This is natural. When people put on an act for other people, they always draw both themselves and their audience to destruction, committing spiritual assassinations in the theater.

And so the first temptation was pleasure, an attempt to make pleasure independent of God. This is how people become alcoholics, drug addicts, drunkards, and fornicators: by people wanting to experience pleasure exclusive of God. And the devil offered Christ the same thing he offered to Eve. He says: Work a miracle, experience pleasure exclusive of God. But Jesus says: No, man must obey God alone. He must seek the Word of God, he must seek God's revelation in every instance. And even when faced with a choice between bread and

the Word of God, what should he seek? The Word of God! God's Word abides forever, and it is food for man.

Then the devil tempts Christ a second time: he takes Him and sets Him on the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple stood on a high hill, and beneath the pinnacle of the temple was an abyss sixty meters deep. And the devil says: *If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning Thee: and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone* (Mt. 4, 6).

The devil was the first sectarian. You know, the Jehovah's Witnesses often come up to people on the street, and say: "Let's study the Bible, and you'll see that Christ wasn't really the Son of God." The devil was the first of these "Jehovah's Witnesses". He always distorts the Word of God. Jesus then says: *It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God* (Mt. 4:7). So what is the devil proposing? He says: work a miracle for the sake of the miracle, to glorify Yourself; manifest Your will, manifest the lust of the eyes, to make a spectacle, and people will come running from the ends of the earth to gawk. What a spectacle that would be: a man jumps from a height of sixty meters and lands unscathed! But Jesus says: One must not tempt the Lord God. One must not make a spectacle of miracles. God is serious, and in God there is no room for spectacles. God is truth; He does not nourish fantasies. He sees and works truth. This is why true creativity in an artist

or writer is co-creativity with God, not fantasy or invention.

Further on, the devil offers Him the third temptation. Do you recall how Eve was seduced? She was offered a fruit which was pleasing to the eye — a beauty separate from God, independent. Take the novel *The Master and Margarita* — such beauty! How can one not read something so beautiful? Yet it explicitly blasphemes God. The Lord rejects false beauty and miracles, and rejects spectacles exclusive of God.

And so the devil takes the Lord and sets Him on the top of a high mountain, and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world in an instant, and says: *All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me* (Mt. 4:9). Bow to me, and I will give You power. This is the devil's third temptation — the pride of life, which he offered to Eve. He now offers it to Jesus. The devil invents nothing new; he is not a creative spirit. What he has always known he continues to offer us to this day. And observe — all our temptations come down to exactly this: enjoyments, pleasures, plenty of money, spectacles, strength, supernatural strength, and power. All the world's temptations come down to this. And the Lord speaks His word, as the Scripture says: *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve* (Mt. 4:10). Behold, God says: do not serve your homeland, do not serve man, do not serve your family. You can work for your homeland, you can work for your family, but you must serve only God. He says: Power is of no use if it is

without God. But we must remember that Satan was lying: the kingdom of this world does not belong to the devil. He was lying to Christ's face. The kingdom of the world belongs to God, and He promotes to kingship and deposes therefrom as He pleases. While the devil … remember, even in *The Master and Margarita* the devil organizes the ball, but that is all. He can hold the carnival, he can put on the masks, but he cannot control reality. He can only control people's passions. Yes, he does have power, but it is the power of lies. True power he does not have.

Then the devil leaveth Him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him (Mt. 4:11).

After this Jesus went out and began to preach to His disciples and to the people of the coming Kingdom of God. He established a new law, the law of freedom. Jesus is called Christ — why? The word *Christ* means "anointed one". Anointed ones have included kings, prophets, and priests. Tell everyone exactly this: Christ is at once King, and Prophet, and Priest. As King He waged war with the devil and freed the prisoners in Hades. As Priest He offered Himself in sacrifice, for the chief office of the priest is to offer sacrifices.

Frequently people say: We have a bad priest; he doesn't know how to give a sermon. But we need to realize that this is not the chief office of the priest. The chief office of the priest is to serve and to offer sacrifice to God. If a priest knows how to pray, he is an excellent priest, though he be a poor speaker. There are some men of prayer who can say but a few

words, sometimes coarse and unpleasant — after all, the man just doesn't have a gift for words! — yet these words reach the heart, because the priest spoke them not of himself.

And finally, as Prophet, because He concluded the final agreement with God. The word *testament* means "agreement" — an agreement that comes into force after someone's death; a will. It is my hope that you will all read the conditions of this agreement.

And so He preached, bringing the Law of God to perfection, to completion. And He rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for their iniquities, healed the sick, raised the dead, and cast out evil spirits. Even before His Resurrection He showed Himself to be the Conqueror of death. He showed Himself as the true King, who does not spare even His own life for His subjects in the fight against death. He conquered sin and death in fair combat. Naturally, the devil was highly displeased, you understand. And so he began to act through his minions, through his spiritual familiars, those disciples of the devil the Pharisees and scribes, so that they would put an end to Christ. He began acting through envy, the very same feeling that, along with pride, had cast the devil himself down from the Heavens.

But before this the Lord chose for Himself twelve of His closest disciples, whom He called *apostles*, meaning "messengers". And to these disciples He gave the same power to heal, to raise the dead, and to preach. Their chief task was to preach the coming Kingdom of God. Note that the primary message

of the Gospel is not that people must be good, but that people must change. So that the Kingdom of God will draw near. The primary message is that the Kingdom of God is already among us. Does the Kingdom of God exist now on earth?

A: Yes, it does!

FD: Yes, indeed. The Church itself is God's Kingdom on earth, the Kingdom of grace, the Kingdom in which people are transfigured — the Kingdom of the Creator Himself. For the Head of the Church is Christ. To the apostles the Lord revealed particular mysteries, and through them the Church was later established.

Finally, the hatred of the devil and his henchmen reaches its peak, and he resolves to do away with Christ. And so, forty days before His death, the Lord went up onto Mount Tabor along with His three closest disciples — Peter, James, and John — and during prayer He was transfigured. This means that He manifested plainly what had always been: His face began to shine like the sun, and His clothing became white as snow — whiter than any bleach in the world could have made it. And along with Him appeared two of the ancient prophets — Elijah and Moses. Why Moses? Moses as the founding father of the Old Testament, as he who concluded the Old Testament between God and Man. And Elijah as one who had not been subjected to death. We know that Elijah the Prophet has not tasted of death to this day, though nearly three thousand years have passed since the day of his birth. He was taken into

paradise alive, and at the end of the world will come to earth again to preach repentance.

… [*W*]*ho appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem* (Lk. 9:31). Observe: what is He discussing on Tabor? Death, the crucifixion. Peter says: *Lord, it is good for us to be here* (Mt. 17:4). Indeed, imagine yourself standing before the radiant face of God, beholding the glory that will be present in the Kingdom of Heaven. Six days prior to the Transfiguration the Lord said that there were several of those present who would not see death until they had seen the Kingdom of God come with power. In other words, they would see the Kingdom of God clearly made manifest. Imagine: you are already practically in the Kingdom of God, and you are filled with immeasurable joy.

And Peter says: *Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias* … But the Gospel adds: … *not knowing what he said* (Lk. 9:33). At that moment a shining cloud descended upon the mountain, and there was a voice out of the cloud: *This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him* (Mt. 17:5). Once again the Father had born witness to His Son that He is the True Son of the True Father.

After this the Lord descends from the mountain and instructs them to say nothing of this miracle until He has risen from the dead. And the Lord, as we know, foretold on numerous occasions that He would die, and be crucified on the cross, that His own people would betray Him, that His disciple

would betray Him, that He would be given over to the Gentiles, and be spat upon, mocked, and crucified, and on the third day would rise again. This He foretold on numerous occasions. And this event was looming, drawing ever closer.

Finally, shortly before the feast of the Passover, Christ worked one of His greatest miracles: He raised Lazarus, a corpse four days dead. Can you imagine what a four day-old corpse would be like in the East, where it's hot? In the East, in the climate of those parts, after four days a corpse would be almost completely decayed. And how did He raise him? *He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth* (Jn. 11:43). And the latter came forth, wrapped in a winding sheet.

I have been in that cave myself — a remarkable cave, difficult to enter even in ordinary clothing. Yet he came out while bound, bound hand and foot with a winding sheet, with covered face: he made his way out, and actually managed to climb those high steps. A wonder within a wonder, as the Church sings in her hymns. And the Pharisees who heard of this, along with the leaders of the people, the priests, were furious. He's on the verge of inciting revolt, they said: we will lose power, and the Romans will attack and rout us all. Better for us to kill Him. And Caiaphas, the high priest at the time, said explicitly: *Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not* (Jn. 11:49–50). Thus he involuntarily prophesied, foretelling that Christ

would die not for Himself, but for others, so as to lead others to God.

A few days after Lazarus was raised from the dead, on the day when the Passover lamb was being selected to be offered at the Passover sacrifice, Jesus goes to Jerusalem. He sits upon the foal of an ass and triumphantly enters the city. People spread their clothes before Him, meeting Him with palm branches and crying: *Hosanna; Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest* (Mk. 11:9–10). The entire nation of Jerusalem, crowds of people, meet Christ in jubilation, going out with joy to meet the Lord. They hope that this is His way of proclaiming Himself the Messiah promised by the prophets. But in Him they are seeking not the Messiah promised by the prophets, not a suffering Messiah: they are seeking a political leader, a commander who will cast off the yoke of the occupying forces, raise up a kingdom for Israel, and through it conquer every land. But as Christ descends the mountain He does not rejoice; rather, he begins to weep for Jerusalem. He says: *If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon*

another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation (Lk. 19:42–44).

And so He enters the temple, and there He drives out those who sold therein. Over the next three days He concludes His last great denunciation of the Hebrew leaders, the heads of the Hebrew nation, for their wrongdoing, the result of which is that they become absolutely livid. At this point one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot by name, goes to the chief priests and says: *What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?* (Mt. 26:15).

Why did he do this? Because he was a lover of money, and a lover of money finds Christ's company highly disagreeable. Christ teaches not to be attached to the earth. Many, many people have left the Church because they found Christ's company repulsive, because He teaches that our homeland is in the Heavens. People want to live here on earth, to arrange their lives comfortably in this world.

And one of the first such people was Judas Iscariot. He decided to betray Christ and turn a profit at the same time. The high priests told him: We'll give you thirty silver coins. This was the price paid for a runaway slave. Thus, the Pharisees compared Christ to a runaway slave. This took place on Wednesday, which is why we fast on Wednesday — the day of Judas' betrayal.

The next day was the day of the Jewish Passover, the greatest feast of the Jewish year, the day the Hebrews were delivered from Egyptian slavery. On this day a lamb was slaughtered, and its blood applied to the lintels of the house, and its meat was

roasted and eaten with bitter herbs. At the Lord's command, Peter and John prepared the Passover in the home of one of the disciples. That evening the time came when the Lord gathered them all for a final evening meal. This momentous event is known as "the Last Supper". And before the Last Supper the Lord showed an example of humility to all men, right up to our own time. When all had reclined, the Lord Himself, taking off His outer garment, girded Himself with a towel and began Himself to wash the feet of all the disciples — something usually done by servants. And He said: *If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him* (Jn. 13:14–16). This is the principle of Christ: whoever desires to be greater than all, let him be to all a servant. The world's principle is this: whoever desires to be greater than all, let him trample all others underfoot to reach his goal. But Christ's principle is the opposite: if you desire to be greater than all, abase yourself.

After the Supper the Lord took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to His disciples and said: *Take, eat; this is My Body* (Mt. 26:26). After this speech He took the cup of wine mingled with water and said: *Drink ye all of it; For this is My Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins* (Mt. 26:27–28). In other words, the Blood is not

poured out for all, because not all wish to receive it: … *for many for the remission of sins.*[7]

… [*T*]*his do in remembrance of me* (Lk. 22:19). The Apostle Paul says that this sacrament, the Sacrament of Communion, the Sacrament of the Eucharist, will continue to the very end of the world, until the Lord returns again. To this day we partake of the Lord's Flesh and drink of His Blood. This is the greatest Sacrament of the Church, the Liturgy — when we partake of the Body and Blood of the Lord. This is the pinnacle of all pinnacles; there is simply nothing higher than this. In this way a person becomes one with God. God comes to abide in him, burns up all his sins, and cleanses his iniquities. Indeed, this simply cannot be conveyed with words. See for yourselves. As it is said: *O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him* (Ps. 33:9).

At this moment we remember the Lord's death: we confess His redeeming death, and we proclaim the glad tidings of His Resurrection. And at this moment the Lord offered His own Self in sacrifice. Behold, He says that the Blood is spilled even now, yet He remains whole; He is yet unharmed. In this way He shows that He Himself gives Himself over, voluntarily, to suffering. He did not have to die, you know, did not have to at all; all things are within His

[7] A more accurate way of phrasing the Orthodox Church's understanding of this passage would be that Christ's Blood is indeed shed for all (*cf.* commentary of Blessed Theophylact of Ochrid and the monk Euthymius Zigabenus), but that, as the author states, not all wish to receive it. — *Trans.*

power. He requires no-one's death whatsoever; all things are possible for Him. But He gives His own Self over to sacrifice. He is Himself the High Priest Who offers Himself in sacrifice for the people, to redeem them from the curse.

Further on, the Lord says: *But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth Me is with Me on the table* (Lk. 22:21). Unfortunately, this happens today, as well. The hand of those who betray Christ is with Him on the table to this day. Many people receive Holy Communion, like Judas, in order to then go and betray Him. These are those who deliberately receive Communion in order to then go and do evil. People who receive Communion in order to do evil are true traitors, like Judas the traitor.

After this they began to ask who the traitor was, and the Lord indicated him with a piece of bread which He had dipped in the salt cellar. This was His last gesture to the traitor to recall him to his senses. But Judas did not wish to come to his senses, and he took the bread, and along with the bread Satan entered into him. And he went out into the night. This was symbolic. He went out into eternal darkness. After this he saw only darkness. The night passed, and on the next day he hanged himself. And so he went to fetch for the thirty pieces of silver and the guards.

Jesus said some very beautiful words in His farewell address, which many of you have already read — His address from the Gospel of John, about how He is going to His Father and will prepare a place for us; that He will send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit,

in His stead, but that He will return again and take us to Himself. All our hopes are linked to this, all our hopes are in the Heavens. For Christians are they whose homeland lies beyond the bounds of the earth and of the visible heavens.

After this He lead them in hymns, hymns that are sung to this day at funerals: He sang His own funeral while He was yet alive. And with a hymn He ascended the Mount of Olives. And He came to the Garden of Gethsemane, meaning "olive garden", and there began to sorrow and to be heavy of heart. And He said to His disciples: *My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with Me* (Mt. 26:38). He withdrew to a place a stone's throw away from them, fell on His knees, and began to pray: *O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt* (Mt. 26:39). Why did He say this? Why do you suppose the Lord was sorrowful at all?

A: At His approaching death.

FD: We ourselves are accustomed to die, because each evil we commit is another step closer to death. We must die; this, we know, is a given. But our Lord committed no evil. He was capable of dying, He was a man, but He did not have to die. He was capable of dying, but not having committed a single sin He need not have died, do you see? There was no death within Him. He is the only person Who need not have died. After all, even now we mortals find this terrifying. We are afraid of death; nobody wants to die. But He, the only person Who need not have died, was about to die. And to die not for His own

sake. Furthermore, what was this cup about which He prayed? He had to drink the cup of God's wrath, of God's fury — the cup of the curse. Remember, any evil incurs God's wrath against us, incurs the fury of God Who lives unto the ages of ages. He, the only Innocent One, had to receive the curse in the stead of the guilty. Can you fathom the horror of this? And so He prayed: *O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt* (Mt. 26:39).

Then He rose and went to the disciples, hoping that they would assist Him in prayer. But they were sleeping. Then He began to pray a second time, and spoke the same words. Then He went to them yet again, and again He found them sleeping. Then He said a third time: *O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done* (Mt. 26:42). … *and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground* (Lk. 22:44) — not just drops, but clots, because the vessels on His forehead were bursting, and the blood was running down his face from the strain, because His human will did not want to die. But within Him it submitted itself to the divine will. Then an angel from Heaven appeared, strengthening His human nature; otherwise He would have utterly collapsed.

And when He had prayed, He went to His disciples and said: *Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray Me* (Mt. 26:45–46). At this moment Judas approaches and kisses Him. And

Jesus says to him: *Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?* (Lk. 22:48).

But even now He showed that the guards could not have taken Him against His will. He went to the officers who wanted to arrest Him, and said: *Whom seek ye?* (Jn. 18:4). They said: Jesus of Nazareth. And He answers: I am. What does this mean, "I am"? I am God. Take Me. And they fell backwards to the ground. Then He says to them again: Whom seek ye? They say: Jesus of Nazareth. He says: I have told you that I am He. Take Me. And only then did they arrest Him, take Him, and bind Him. Peter attempted to resist, cutting off the ear of Malchus, a servant. But Jesus promptly healed the man who had come to arrest Him, and said: *Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and he shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?* (Mt. 26:52–53). A legion is between six and eight thousand. Could He not have summoned seventy-two thousand angels to His defense? But then how would the will of the Father have been done?

Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled, and He was taken to the priests for questioning. He was questioned and accused of calling Himself the Son of God. At first they merely tried to find a false witness against Him, but they failed. They could find nothing of which to accuse Jesus. The false witnesses contradicted each other's testimony. This is why the observant reader of the Gospel will likely note that the testimony of the false witnesses is

inconsistent, varying from one Gospel to the next. What did the chief priest decide to do next? He arose and adjured Him by the name of God, saying: *I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God* (Mt. 26:63). Jesus answered him: I am. He called Himself by the name of God; this is how He called Himself. Furthermore: ... *nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven* (Mt. 26:64). Then the chief priest tore his clothes and said: *He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy* (Mt. 26:65). Then the whole Sanhedrin said before the whole council: He is guilty of death.

Then they began to mock and deride Him, to spit in His face, to cover His face with a cloak, to strike Him, and to say: *Prophesy unto us, Thou Christ, Who is he that smote Thee?* (Mt. 26:68). Can you imagine? They were striking God!

Judas was not the only one who proved a traitor. Peter, too, the closest of His disciples, who had sworn that he alone would never deny Him, denied Him thrice. At first he was afraid of the servant girl, and said: I do not know the man. Then twice he swore with oaths that He did not know Him. Thus he denied Christ three times, and at this the cock crowed twice. Jesus turned and looked at him, and Peter remembered the words the Lord had spoken to him, and he went out and wept bitterly. There is an ancient account of the apostle Peter that to

his dying day each time a rooster crowed he would rise and begin to weep. There are even icons where Peter is depicted with red streaks coming from his eyes. Why? Because he repented, and wept over his betrayal. But Jesus forgave him after the Resurrection, because Peter came to repentance. If Judas had come to repentance, He would have forgiven him, as well.

But the night of sufferings wore on, and a second council of the Sanhedrin was held, at which the sentence was confirmed, and Jesus was led away to Pilate. For a long time Pilate did not want to condemn Jesus, but he caved in to their intimidation: they brought pressure to bear on him. He attempted to pass Jesus' case off to another king, King Herod, but Herod also found Jesus not guilty and made fun of Him. Pilate selected the following expedient to avoid sentencing Jesus to death: he decided to punish Christ by scourging, and He was tied to a pillar. This pillar, a low pillar of marble, stands to this day in Jerusalem. And He was scourged with a whip with hooks sewn into it. Then they clothed Him in royal clothing, of purple, and then placed something on His head, crowning Him. And with what? With a crown of thorns. They placed a rod in his hand, bowed before Him, spat in His face, and struck Him on the head with the rod.

If you visit the Meeting of the Lord Monastery in Moscow, there you can see an exact copy of the Shroud of Turin. The image is absolutely astounding! Look closely: there Christ's sufferings are clearly visible. Forensic pathologists who have

studied the image on the Shroud of Turin number Christ's wounds at 296!

And so Christ was led out: Pilate leads Him out for all the people to see, clothed in the crown of thorns and in purple, and says: *Behold the Man!* (Jn. 19:5). But the Jews cried: *Crucify Him, crucify Him* (Jn. 19:6). He said: *Take ye Him, and crucify Him: for I find no fault in Him*. They cried: *If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar* (Jn. 19:12). He asked: *Shall I crucify your King?* (Jn. 19:15). *We have no king but Caesar*, cried the Jews. Pilate attempted to release Jesus after punishing Him, for the sake of the feast, but the people asked that he release Barabbas, a robber: they chose a murderer. The Jewish people preferred a murderer to Christ, and Christ they gave over to be crucified! And so He was lead through the city streets.

It is truly worthwhile to walk the Way of the Cross in the holy city of Jerusalem. If you are ever there, be certain to walk it. There you will see the Gate of Judgment. When a prisoner was being lead through that gate along the Via Dolorosa — "the Way of Sorrows — any person could come out and say: Stop the procession; I know what may be said in this person's defense. But not one such person was found in all Jerusalem.

And so He was led, but He fell beneath the weight of the Cross, and was unable to carry it further. Then they compelled another, Simon of Cyrene, to carry His Cross. Jesus went on before, and all the people mocked Him. Only a few women wept. He said:

Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children (Lk. 23:28).

And when He was brought to be crucified, they nailed Him to the Cross, pounding square nails through His hands and feet, and hung Him on a high hill, and beside Him they hung two thieves. Why? To show that He was a thief just like them. And above Him they hung the accusation against Him. What accusation? "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews". And so it happened that Pilate surprisingly, and in fact providentially, pronounced Him King. Why is Jesus called King? Because He died on the Cross, and only a king can die for his subjects. A president cannot; a king can. Here Christ truly displays the greatest possible nobility. And in His sufferings there is much that is providential. By His being stripped naked on the Cross the Lord healed the nakedness of Adam and Eve, who after the fall into sin saw that they were naked. And by the thorns from the thorn bush that dug into His head … remember what was said of the earth? *Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee* (Gen. 3:18). Adam was told that the earth would bring forth thorns. And here, in healing the earth, the Lord healed it by His wounds, allowing the thorns of the crown to sink into His head. God, Christ, was beaten on the head with a rod, a reed, and with this reed He wrote out the absolution of sins for all men. Incidentally, the pillar to which the Savior was tied for scourging is in the Church of the Resurrection. If you place your ear to this pillar, to this day you can hear the frightful whistling

of a whip beating a human body, and you can hear the shouts of the frenzied crowd. I myself and many others have heard it.

And so they crucified Him. It was a feast day, and crowds of people gathered on the mount of Golgotha, walking around and mocking Him, crying: *Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God* (Mt. 27:40–43). What is most remarkable is that His enemies themselves unwittingly repeated the prophecy regarding what the Messiah's enemies would say, mocking Him, when they should see Him crucified. They did not wish to, yet they fulfilled the prophecy. Indeed, many prophecies were fulfilled with the Lord's Cross.

Why was the Lord crucified specifically on the Cross? Because on the Cross He hung in the air. The air is the domain of the prince of darkness. He destroyed the domain of the prince of darkness. He spilled His Blood, and without Blood there can be no forgiveness. And this Blood washed away the sins of the people, and of their forebears. His hands were pierced to heal the extended hand of Eve, who together with Adam stretched out her hand to the tree of knowledge. And His feet were pierced to heal the feet that fled from God. Remember, Eve

and Adam hid from God in the bushes. Many others have also fled from God. Have you not been fleeing from God? For a long time you were fleeing, until God finally caught you. And so in order to heal those feet, so that people would run no more from Him, Christ's feet were pierced.

Thus, even on the Cross He continued to save people. One of the thieves on the cross blasphemed Him, but the other admonished the blasphemer and said: *Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss* (Lk. 23:40–41). Then he turned to Jesus and said: *Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom* (Lk. 23:42). To Him Christ said: *Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise* (Lk. 23:43). The criminal, the bandit, the pillager, the thief, was the first of all men to enter paradise — the first, can you imagine? Not a righteous man, not Abraham, not Moses, but the repentant thief. We are told this as an example of how the Lord accepts the repentance of any person, if only that person comes to Him.

Then, suddenly, at midday darkness fell. The sun went black. Why? Because it could not bear to see its Creator hanging upon the Cross. Imagine: He Who commands the Sun and the celestial bodies now hangs upon a tree. And this the sun could not endure. Christ's sufferings were constantly intensifying: do not forget, He was drinking the cup of God's curses. That Friday was the day of His Passion, and for this reason on Friday we invariably fast.

And so Christ's sufferings continued to intensify, and He cried: *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?* (Mt. 27:46). He cried out not in His own behalf, but in behalf of all accursed mankind. He felt the full crushing weight of God's curse which lay upon all men, and He drank to the dregs this cup of the curse, this cup of God-forsakenness.

Even before He was crucified, He asked, and they offered Him wine with myrrh, but they were of such revolting quality that the wine had become vinegar, and the myrrh, gall. In the Church on Great Friday we remember this event, saying: Ungrateful Jews! How did ye repay God for the manna with which He fed you? Ye gave Him vinegar mingled with gall!

And so He hung upon the Cross. Imagine: a Man hangs, His veins pierced, in the open air. He has lost a tremendous amount of blood, and His hands are being continuously torn, because He must pull Himself up with His hands in order to breathe, or else His lungs will fill with fluid. And so He says: I thirst — and is given vinegar with gall.

Then He said: *It is finished* (Jn. 19:30). At last, that for which He had come into the world had been accomplished. The price was paid; the Innocent One had died for the guilty. And He said: *Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost* (Lk. 23:46).

At that same instant, in that place there was a terrible earthquake. To this day the traces of that earthquake may be seen in Jerusalem — cracks that split the mountain. Then the Blood of Jesus poured out upon the head of the first man to be buried

beneath Golgotha, upon the head of Adam, washing away his sins. At that same moment the curtain of the temple which separated the Holy of Holies from the sanctuary, into which the high priest alone entered but once a year, was torn in half, signifying that the Old Testament had come to an end. And many of the saints rose from the dead and appeared in Jerusalem after His Resurrection once again, signifying that death's power had been rent asunder, because the Lord had died on the Cross. The ransom had been paid. Christ had offered Himself in sacrifice for men's sins.

In the meantime the priests came to Pilate, and asked him to have the thieves' shins broken, to reduce the duration of the execution. They pierced Christ's ribs because He had already died, to be certain that He was dead, and from His ribs flowed blood and water. Thus, just as Adam fell asleep and Eve was created from His rib, so also now the New Adam, Christ, dies, and sleeps the sleep of death, and from His rib is born the new Eve — the Orthodox Church, which is born in the waters of baptism. The sacred water in which people are baptized is that very water that flowed from the wounds of Christ. And in Communion the Church nourishes its children with the saving Blood of Christ.

Thus, by a piercing of the ribs was healed the transgression of her who was taken from a rib. Everything is connected: the first day of mankind and the last day of mankind, the most important days of mankind, are interrelated; the first Adam

and the last Adam, the first Eve and the last Eve — the Church.

Near Christ stood the Virgin Mary and John. And before He died the Lord made John the son of the Virgin Mary, and in John's person made all of us Christians her children. Since that time all have called the Virgin Mary their Mother. Such was the will of Christ, which He Himself pronounced upon the Cross.

After this came a rich man named Joseph, a member of the council, together with Nicodemus. They begged Pilate to give them the Body of Jesus, and took Christ down, and wrapped Him in a shroud, which is now kept in the Vatican; laid Him in a tomb, a cave of stone; and laid a great many spices about Him. The tomb they closed with a stone, so that no-one could steal Christ's Body. And on the following day the high priests and Pharisees identified the Body, sealed the tomb, and set a guard so that no-one could steal the Body. This, the people thought, would put an end to the matter of Christ. But this was not the end.

For the moment Christ died, His soul left His Body and descended into Hades. Where did all souls go? To Hades. So there went Christ, as well. The devil sat there, rubbing his hands: he thought Christ's Soul would meet the same fate as that of anyone else. But he was doomed to bitter disappointment. Christ entered Hades, and there He manifested His divinity. Do you remember Who Christ was? He had no separate human personality: He was God the Son in Person, and in Hades His identity was revealed. And

Hades, the place of eternal darkness, was suddenly flooded with light. Can you imagine the devil's horror at the sight?!

And Christ said to the devil: You have a claim to sinners, you invented sin and they committed it; men's souls were justly sent to Hades. Now you are stripped of your claim to all. As the prophet foretold: *Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? But thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children. And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob* (Is. 49:24–26). This He did: He justly put the murderer to death, and the souls of men He led out of Hades and into paradise. Thus, those who had awaited and sought God in the Old Testament were saved by the Blood of Jesus: John the Baptist, who had previously been executed, and Symeon the God-receiver, and Moses, and the other prophets — all of them entered into the Heavenly Kingdom, into paradise regained. And finally, at the very bottom of Hades the Lord found His old friend Adam, who for so long had been running from Him, and He lead him into paradise along with the other righteous ones.

Death is lethal, you know. Death destroys our personality. What happens to a person when he dies? His personality is destroyed. A person's self acts in

both his soul and his body. Since the body dies and the soul is separated from the body, the personality is destroyed. But this did not happen to Christ. He had only one Self: the divine. God is omnipresent, limited by nothing, neither by space nor by time. This is why in the hymns we sing that He was in the grave bodily, but in Hades with His soul as God, in paradise with the thief and on the throne with the Father and the Spirit — simultaneously. Death attempted to destroy His personality. And death broke its teeth. For the first time death could not destroy a personality; a body was not subjected to corruption. Why do many saints today leave behind incorrupt relics? They obtain incorruption from the might of Christ. Up until then there was no physical incorruption by grace.

Furthermore, His Soul was not separated from His Body. They were separated by space, but the Personality was one: through the Divine Personality of Christ His Body and Soul remained united. And as the apostle Peter says in his famous sermon on the day of Pentecost: … *God hath raised* [Him] *up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it* (Acts 2:24). What he means is this: death was in the throes of labor; it could not endure the life that was within it. Death exploded; indeed, death had explosives concealed at its core. And those explosives detonated.

On the third day, at night on the eve of Sunday, by His own divinity Jesus arose from the dead. His Body was again united with His Soul, and His Body was transfigured: it remained a body, but acquired

the new qualities that we will have after the resurrection. He passed through the shroud, burning into it His image. He passed through stone, and invisibly passed the guard. He no longer required food, though He could partake of food. He could no longer die: He had become physically immortal, impervious to any illness; He had become the Conqueror of death. Death had been killed. In the hymns at Pascha we sing these words: "We celebrate the death of death, the destruction of Hades, the beginning of another life eternal." Why is the feast of Pascha the most wondrous feast for us? Even when people who are not very religious come to church on the feast and see Pascha, they too experience joy. Why? Because the might of the Conqueror of death extends even to unbelievers. This might of the Resurrection is so great that at the end of time it will resurrect all men, both believers and unbelievers. Unbelievers, however, will be unable to use it to the good of their souls. But the bodies of all men will be resurrected.

This is why Christ is called the First-born of the dead. Naturally, other people died before Him. But the process of resurrection from the dead began with Him. He was the first, and all mankind follows after Him.

And after this the Angel of the Lord broke the seal, rolled away the stone from the tomb, broke the laws, and, as the scripture literally says: *And, behold, there was a great earthquake*: *for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it* (Mt. 28:2). The

stone was large, weighing two tons, and the angel flung it up to the top of the cliff and sat upon it. The guards did not resist, but fled in fright.

The first to the tomb were the women, who brought from the angel the news of the Resurrection, after which several of the women met Christ, Who said to them: Rejoice. To Mary Magdalene He said: *Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father: but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God* (Jn. 20:17). Why did He say this? Because she wanted to approach Him simply, humanly, but His Body had already been glorified, and He had to be approached with pious reverence.

After this the disciples saw Christ many times: Peter saw Him, James and the other apostles saw Him, two disciples on the road to Emmaus saw Him, recognizing Christ in the breaking of bread; ten of the apostles saw Him in the evening, when they were given the power to bind and to loose, whereby the sacrament of ordination was instituted. And Christ breathed into them a new, divine breath. How was man created, do you remember? God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life. And now the Risen Christ restores to man that divine breath. Man became permeated with the new breath of life.

Why do you think the Lord rose on Sunday?

A: It was the beginning of new life.

FD: Creation ceased on Friday. As on Saturday God rested from His works, so also the Lord rested in the tomb. And on Sunday a new universe began. You see, the night of Pascha marks the beginning of

a new universe. As on Sunday God created the world out of nothing, so also on Sunday God renewed it. Why do you think Mary Magdalene mistook Christ for the gardener? (Whoever has read the Gospel should remember that at first Mary Magdalene mistook Him for the gardener.) Because He restored paradise. And the Lord's tomb was in a garden — just as the fall occurred in a garden, so also in a garden man was restored. Why did the Lord appear first to a woman? She who was the first to hear the curse was also the first to hear joy. Indeed, this moment marks the beginning of an era of great joy, the era of the Lord's Resurrection, the era of eternal life, the era of Pascha. *Pascha* means "passover". And this moment marks the beginning of a passing-over from death to life, from corruption to incorruption.

Over the course of forty days the Lord appeared to His disciples, ate bread with them, and ate honey and fish with them, to show them that He also was a man, that He could be touched, so that no-one could later say they had been hallucinating. In that time more than five hundred people saw him at one time, and He taught His disciples the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. He taught them the sacraments that we perform in the Church. He baptized His disciples with water and the Spirit and instituted the sacrament of baptism, described in the Gospel of Matthew.

Finally, on the fortieth day Jesus appeared to His disciples in Jerusalem, and together with them ascended the Mount of Olives. And they asked Him: *Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom*

to Israel? (Acts 1:6). Once again they were thinking of Him in human terms, or rather in Jewish terms, material, earthly terms. But Jesus answered: *It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And ye will preach repentance beginning at Jerusalem, and remission of sins* (Acts 1:7–8). Not merely repentance, as John preached, but — even more importantly — forgiveness of sins.

It has been rightly observed that many today understand the role of repentance, but not many comprehend the benefits of forgiveness of sins. The truth is, this is an incredibly great phenomenon — forgiveness of sins. If a person repents but his sins are not forgiven, this is not enough.

And so, after this He was raised up into the air before them and ascended into the Heavens. And the shining cloud of the Holy Spirit received Him. Jesus passed through all the heavens, He passed through the sky, went beyond the bounds of outer space, and passed above all the angelic worlds, and now sits bodily at the right hand, or on the right side, of God. In what sense? He now rules the world not only as God, but as Man. And His Body, the same as we have, sits on the throne of the Divinity. Imagine that! Truly the mystery of mysteries, and the greatest of marvels. Thus, in the Symbol of Faith we say:

"Who sitteth at the right hand of the Father" — truly a marvelous occurrence.

While the apostles were standing gazing up at the sky, two youths appeared to them — angels — who said: *Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven* (Acts 1:11). Thus, we await the Lord's return to earth exactly as He ascended to Heaven. But what happened ten days after Ascension, on the day of Pentecost?

A: The Holy Spirit descended.

FD: The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity, God, descended upon the apostles in the form of tongues of fiery, and renewed them, and established the Kingdom of God on earth. The gift of the Holy Spirit lives in the Church to this day, and He renews all who enter into it. The Holy Spirit established the Church, and the Church fulfills the Lord's commands to preach the Gospel throughout all the earth.

The Lord promised: when the Church concludes its work — that is, when the Gospel has been preached to all the peoples of the earth, the inviolate apostolic Gospel, preserved in the Orthodox Church — He will come again. And now you and I see that the Lord's command is being increasingly fulfilled: the Orthodox Church is indeed extending to all the ends of the world, bearing the Gospel of the Kingdom.

The Lord will return and gather into His nets all those pleasing to God, destined from the beginning

for salvation. God gathers to Himself all His people whom He has redeemed — all the people who have desired to benefit from the fruits of redemption. Now is the time of the harvest. But we know that the harvest does not go on forever. When the season of harvest is over, the work of the harvest also will end.

And so, when the Gospel has been fully preached, then will come the end of the world. How will it occur? On the one hand, as I said, the Church will grow, uniting all those who desire holiness. On the other hand, evil will increase, and it too will reach its utmost limits. And the greatest enemy of all men will come to power. Not the devil himself, but a man of his choosing, called the Antichrist. This will happen when the last remnants of the Roman Empire collapse. To this day we are living amid the remnants of the Roman Empire; we are living by the laws of Roman jurisprudence. It could be said that both Russia and America are a continuation of the Roman Empire; even the state symbols have stayed the same. When the last remnants of the universal Roman Empire collapse, the last of the four empires that the prophet Daniel saw, when the world plunges into chaos, out of that chaos will emerge the greatest enemy — the Antichrist, who will come at first covertly, deceiving by means of sorcery and false miracles, and appearing to be good.

We need to remember that he will be a person. He will not be the devil incarnate, because the devil cannot become incarnate: this is not God. But he will be possessed by the devil. As you know, there are demon-possessed people who growl at services

or when holy things are brought out. He will be possessed not by a person, not by an ordinary demon, but by Lucifer himself, the prince of darkness. He will be a Jew of the tribe of Dan, and Israel will receive him as the Messiah, as the Lord promised the Jews: *I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive* (Jn. 5:43). And so it will occur: the Jews will receive him, and he will restore the third temple in Jerusalem. Right now preparations are being made around the Temple Mount: the Jews are intensifying preparations for his arrival, watching, waiting.

When I was in Israel, everywhere, even on the buses, I saw written: "We await the swift coming of the mashiah." The Hebrew "mashiah" is the Antichrist himself, the same enemy promised by Scripture. He will deceive the nations, and ultimately they will make him the universal ruler. Then a new world order will be established. There will be one state — the whole planet — with the Antichrist as its king. The capital will be in Jerusalem, and he will sit in the temple of God as a god, passing himself off as a god, and demanding divine worship as a god. And those who bow down before him will be given a mark on their forehead or their right hand. It will be a religious mark, a sign of religious worship. And he will be aided by a false prophet, likewise possessed by a devil, one of the other princes of darkness. And the majority of the people will worship him, as the Bible foretells. Christians will be persecuted, and we know for certain that the Church will be demolished externally, though to the very end of

the world there will still be bishops faithful to God, priests, deacons, and laity, and the Liturgy will be performed to the very end of the world.

But God will not leave the world without chastisement: God will rain down the terrible retribution described in the Revelation of John the Theologian. The rivers and seas will die, and will turn to blood, so that people will be forced to drink the blood which they themselves shed. Hail the size of a talent will fall from the sky — each hailstone weighing fifty kilograms! There will be terrible illnesses and epidemics. And at last God will send His two witnesses, who will preach repentance in the last times. These will be two people who have not seen death to this day: Elijah the Prophet, whom we have already mentioned, and Enoch, the most ancient of men, a descendent of Adam, the seventh after Adam, who was taken up alive into Heaven. Together they will preach repentance, work signs and wonders, and denounce the Antichrist and the people for their iniquities. But the Antichrist will fight against them, and we know that he will kill them and throw them into the streets of Jerusalem, and, as John the Theologian says, all the nations will look upon them. Apparently this is referring to live television, or something similar. And all the nations will send each other gifts in their joy that they are finally dead, these two brightly-burning candles. But after three and a half days, life from the Lord will return to their bodies, and they will arise and will be taken up into Heaven. And the Antichrist will continue to reign.

And here God's final miracle will take place. The Jews will become disillusioned with the Antichrist and will believe in Jesus Christ, and this will be the greatest of God's miracles. This is basically why God has preserved the Hebrew nation up till now: for the sake of this final promise of God. Just as Moses foretold, so it will occur: the Hebrew nation will turn to Christ the Savior, they will be killed by the Antichrist, and the Lord will receive them. And then in his fury the Antichrist will gather all nations to destroy the last of the Christians. When there is nothing left of the Christians, and no hope left for those who remain, then Christ will appear on earth again, in a day when He is not expected, and at an hour when He is not looked for. He will first be preceded by a sign, the sign of eternal Love: a radiant cross will appear in the sky, the sign of God's victory over death. And a flame of fire will go before the face of Christ. Christ will appear with all His angels and will fight against the Antichrist and all his forces.

Do you think the fight will last long?

A: I suppose.

FD: You think so? No, no; the Lord will blow upon them, and that will be the end of it. It is said: … *that Wicked … whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth* (2 Thess. 2:8). He will simply breathe, and all the Antichrist's power will cease. A creation cannot oppose its Creator.

And then a great white throne will be set up, as foretold in the Revelation of John the Theologian, and Christ will judge all men. At this time fire will fall from heaven, and will engulf the whole universe: the

sun will be extinguished, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and all the earth will be engulfed by a global fire; everything will be engulfed in flames. The sky itself will be rolled up like a scroll. Imagine the beauty of it — space rolling up before the face of God! As the Revelation of John the Theologian says: *And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from Whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them* (Rev. 20:11).

And Christ will appear, and all His angels with Him, and they will sound the trumpets as at the appearance of God on Sinai. And at the last, most powerful trumpet blast Christ will call forth the dead. These are the people who have died from the world's beginning to its end, including you and me. Their bodies will once again be united with their immortal souls.

You know that after death a person's soul departs, going either to paradise, if it was baptized and lived according to the commandments, or to hell, if it was unbaptized,[8] or if it was baptized but lived in opposition to God. And here the souls of all men will assemble together. Those who live to see Christ's coming will be transfigured by the fire of the Holy Spirit. And all men will assemble before the throne of God. And upon this throne they will see Christ presiding in His glory, having on His hands and feet the marks of His wounds. Why? So that none may say: "You've never lived in our skin; You can't

[8] The Orthodox Church does not teach that all unbaptized persons without exception will go to hell after death. — *Trans.*

understand us, how hard it is for us." He will show His wounds, and say: "Look; I lived, I walked your path. I am pierced; see My wounds in My side, see My hands and feet, which you pierced with your sins and with your evil deeds."

And then He will render to each according to his deeds. You know, many people say: when will there finally be universal justice? Well, then at last there will be complete, absolute universal justice. Each will receive what he deserves. Finally, each person will be satisfied, and his right to justice will be restored. The Lord will enlighten all men, and this will transfigure men's bodies, so that each in and of himself, the body of each, will precisely depict that person's soul. The bodies of the righteous will shine like the sun, while the sinners will be gloom-enshrouded like storm clouds. For the soul will be fully reflected in the body. And the Lord will separate them: the righteous He will place at His right side, and the sinners at His left. And He will address those on His right, and say: *Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world* (Mt. 25:34).

Observe: when was the Kingdom prepared? The Kingdom was created for us from the very beginning. Hence the apostle Paul says that you and I — those who receive baptism and live according to Christ — are foreknown by God from before the creation of the world. It was for our sake that God created the universe, for our sake the stars were hung … that is, as long as we come to Him. For the sake of the

saints, for our sake … naturally, as long providing we wish to be sanctified.

Come unto Me, He will say. *For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: Naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me* (Matt. 25:35–40). In other words, if you have done something for someone for My sake, you did it for Me.

Then He will turn to those on His left, and will say: *Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not* (Matt. 25:41–43). They will say: *But Lord, when did we not do this? And He will say: Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me* (Mt. 25:45). And then they will go away into eternal torment, but the righteous will enter into life eternal. Sinners — fornicators, adulturers, thieves, drunkards, enviers, drug addicts, murderers, blasphemers, idol worshippers — all these will be thrown into the lake

burning with fire and brimstone. This will be a second death. There they will remain in torment forever, estranged from God. Why? Because I called you, God says, and you did not respond. I summoned you, and you rejected My summons.

And what will be the cause of their suffering? They will suffer because for them the merciful God will be like a consuming fire. For their hatred for God will result in God burning and scorching them. God will say: You wanted to live without Me; go ahead and do so. This is why it is called "outer darkness": because this darkness is outside God. You wanted it this way; go on, get out! Go away forever! And in that place there will no longer be either correction or repentance. It is said: there will be eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth, and the worm will eternally devour men. This worm is not merely physical, but also spiritual: the worm of pangs of conscience, now powerless to change anything.

The righteous, however, shall enter into everlasting life. They will shine as the sun, they will be in the Kingdom with Christ, and they will live in the New Jerusalem, mystically described in Revelations as a city built of a vast variety of precious stones.

Naturally, these are figurative descriptions, things we simply cannot imagine at present. They will drink from the crystal river of life, which flows from the throne of God. They will eat of the tree of life, they will never die, nevermore will they fall into sin, they will ever and increasingly glorify God, and they will rule a new, renewed, transfigured universe,

a new heaven and a new earth, which God will call into being. They will come to know God, and as God is eternal this process will likewise be eternal. And hence Scripture says that they will go from glory to glory, from joy to joy, and of this there shall be no end. And they will eternally behold the face of Christ the Savior, the marks of the wounds on His hands, and, as Symeon the New Theologian says, as the sun is reflected in a multitude of raindrops after a storm, so the face of Christ will be reflected in the multitude of those who are saved, so that God will stand among gods.

And thus the purpose for which God created the world will be accomplished. Angels and men, redeemed by the Blood of Jesus, will comprise a single whole, as they already do mystically. And of their joy there shall be no end. As the apostle Paul says, *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God* (1 Cor. 2:9–10). So you, in receiving baptism and joining the Church, will taste in some part of this joy experienced by those who are saved. This is not some joy that is unknown to us. This is a joy that is revealed to us in the Church, but that will be revealed in its fullness then, when all is made new. Then God Himself, it is said, will wipe away all tears from every face. Then God Himself will comfort men. He will heal all broken hearts, He will heal all the sorrows of men, He will set aright all the fallen. He will lead men

Himself. And all the hopes, all the expectations, all the imaginings that have not been realized on earth, but of which men have dreamed, our fondest, truest dreams — not lustful, not lewd, not spiteful, but true — will come true, and will come true in such a way that each will be able to say that he suffered and did too little, that he did too little to deserve this. Just as it is said that when Abraham, the greatest father of the faithful, saw what was promised to those who are saved, he regretted that he had labored so little. Imagine — he regretted that he had labored too little! Because he saw that ineffable joy that is destined for them that are saved. But it is when the Lord appears in us that this joy will appear in its fullness.

Such is the hope of the Church, and it is precisely for this reason that we wish to be baptized. So then, are you ready? Choose where you want to go, and go there. Make your decision! There are two paths, and the choice is yours.

Why die when you can live?! That is what I wanted to say to you today.

ON BAPTISM AND THE CHURCH SACRAMENTS

FATHER DANIEL: Today we will talk about the Church and the sacraments — what the Church is, what a sacrament is, what baptism is and why we need it.

So then, you and I approach baptism wishing to enter the Church of God. Isn't that so? It would be somewhat absurd for a person to be baptized without wishing to enter the Church. For baptism itself is an entrance into the Orthodox Church. So what is the Church? Is entering the Church like entering the Acropolis? You have come to enter the Church, but you don't know what that means.

ATTENDEE: Into the Orthodox Church.

FD: And what is the Orthodox Church?

A: The house of God.

FD: Let's start by working through these concepts. Right now I'm not talking about the church building, but about the Church as a community of Christians. We have the Russian Orthodox Church; it is part of the Universal Church. You know that Orthodoxy is greater than the Russian Orthodox Church: there are Orthodox Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, Albanians, Americans, Czechs, Slovaks — many nations are part of the Orthodox Church. There are even savage tribes that are part of the Orthodox Church.

But the question is this: what is the Church, and how is it different from other communities? Are there any differences?

A: Differences of religion, I suppose. There are Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, and Protestants, but we're Orthodox.

FD: Yes, we're Orthodox. But let's start with the main thing: how is the Orthodox Church different, say, from a political party — the Communist Party, or the United Russia party?

A: Here a person believes in God, but there he believes in the Party.

FD: With the communists, yes.

A: They believe in something different, they have their own ideals, but here you believe in the Church. You know where you're going: you're going to God, to pray, because you believe in Him.

FD: Let's take a look at the origins: where do parties come from? A few people (or one person) come together and start arranging things the way they want them. Or many people start arranging things they way they want them; it doesn't matter which. In other words, parties come from people. But who created the Church?

A: God.

FD: God created the Church. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the True God, the Eternal Son of God: He created the Church by His Blood. On the Cross of Golgotha He redeemed us from sin, the curse, and death, and created a new humanity for Himself. The Church differs from parties in that the Church is a kind of assembly that was assembled by God, and comprises a community of people who believe in Him, who are different from the rest.

Let's try putting it this way: it comprises an assembly of people who are somehow "different". You know how sci-fi films often revolve around aliens living among us. I would put it this way: in a certain sense, the Church is an assembly of "aliens", and not even aliens, but something more than that it is an assembly of people in whom certain energies are at work, energies from beyond the very borders of outer space. These are the energies of God. For God is beyond the limits of outer space. Hence, the Church is an assembly of people in whose personalities not only the human nature is at work, but two natures: the divine and the human. This is why the Church is called a new humanity. There is ordinary humanity — also called the "world community", "progressive humanity", or whatever. And then there is another humanity, a new humanity, called the Orthodox Church. This new humanity was called into being by God on Golgotha, by the suffering of Christ the Savior on the Cross, by His redeeming Sacrifice. And this community of men is not only created by God, but also headed by God. You do know that the Universal Orthodox Church has no single head (on earth)? All Orthodox Christians have Christ Himself as their head. Without any intermediaries.

How are the Roman Catholics different? Why did we separate from the Roman Catholics? Because they introduced the teaching that we need to have another head besides Christ, that allegedly the

Roman Pope must also head the Church. But we say: No, we need no head but God.

Can we say that the patriarch of Moscow is the head of the entire Church? No, if for no other reason than that there are other local churches. And even the patriarch of Moscow is subject to the authority of the church council. In other words, if the patriarch commits a serious sin, or begins teaching wrong beliefs, he will be deposed by a council of bishops of the local Church. Or, for example, if the council of bishops makes an error, they can be set right by a council of bishops of the Universal Church. God guides the whole Church through the bishops.

If we think about the very word *church*, it will become obvious that this is a completely different community. The word *church* comes from the Greek word *ecclesia*, which literally means "an assembly of those who are called together". Notice it is not "an assembly of those who decide to assemble". The Bible mentions the word *church* in a non-Christian sense. For example, Psalm 25 says: "I have hated the congregation of evil doers". *I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked* (Ps. 25:5).

"I hate the congregation of evil doers" refers to the evil-doers who have also been called together. This particular text refers to the assembly of those whom the devil has assembled. Such "churches" also exist: the sects. They are often organized by satanic, not human, effort.

Do you think the work of Islam can be explained by human factors alone? No, probably not, because

would a person really go and blow up himself and others for no particular reason? No, of course not.

A: Do you mean to say that all of Islam …

FD: I'm simply describing the situation: specific forces are at work in Islam. I have no intention of judging Islam myself; that's for God to do. But I am citing Islam as an example of other forces at work. This is actually the case. And it would be wrong to attempt to think of Islam as a mere assembly of various people, both good and bad. The spiritual forces influencing people within Islam actually do exist; this too is a fact. Do you see? Otherwise, we would be denying what the Muslims themselves claim to be true. If you go up to a person and say: "Oh, you made it all up, it's all just your own human culture," he'll say: "That's not true; I can feel other forces working within me." I've talked with Muslims, and I know that for a fact. As to what forces are at work, that's another question. That's the heart of the matter.

The same is true, say, for the sect of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Can we say that they're just an assembly of people who were conned to get money out of them? No. An assembly like that would not have lasted this long. If it were just about money, the sect would have imploded, like MMM:[9] they collected the money, then vanished. There have been sects that were created to make money, but these sects existed for ten or fifteen years, then disappeared. This is something different. What is frightening about religion? In religion there really are other forces at work.

[9] A pyramid scheme authored by Sergei Mavrodi — *Trans.*

What is religion? Have you ever stopped to think about it? *Religion* means "restoration of a link" with a certain spiritual world. And the spiritual world, as we know, is divided: there is God's world, which serves Him, and there is the world that is hostile to God. Hence, there are both false and true religions (actually, one true religion). Why is strange faith dangerous? A person who believes in God incorrectly is at risk of "electric shock": he is at risk of encountering the spiritual world, of becoming "spiritual". And at times evil spirits may come instead of good ones. Take the Wahhabi movement, for example. Where did Wahhabism come from? In the 17th century there was a preacher, Muhammad Wahhab, who had a certain "revelation" that was subsequently developed. Had there been no "revelation", there would have been no Wahhabism.

Let's return now to the subject of the Church itself. The Church is indeed an assembly of "those who are called together". We believe that it was called together by God, and we believe that God did not merely call it together in the beginning, but continues to guide it. The Church appeared on the day of Pentecost — the day when the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the True Eternal God and Giver of Life, descended upon the apostles. And He regenerated them, imbuing them with the power of the redemption of Christ the Savior. Since that time the Church has existed through succession by ordination. Since that time, just as the tongues of fire descended upon the apostles, so also the Holy Spirit is transmitted through the laying on of hands by the

apostles and their successors, and will continue to do so. Those who transmit this Gift are called bishops. They may also be called patriarchs, metropolitans, or archbishops, but the essence is the same: they are bishops, and they oversee the life of the Church. They are those messengers who assemble others.

Let's go back to the word *ecclesia*. "An assembly of those who are called together" — this was the name given in Greece to an assembly of all free citizens, such as the citizens of Athens, who had the right to adopt laws. Something like a referendum. How was this "referendum" announced? The Areopagus, or the chief rulers of Athens, issued laws and sent heralds — special messengers who assembled the people, announcing that they must assemble at a given time in a given place. Whoever failed to attend was heavily fined.

In exactly the same way the Church was established by Christ through His messengers (the Greek word for "messenger" is *apostolos*). The apostles announce to all men that the time for salvation has come. Whoever does not wish to receive salvation will also pay a "fine": he will be cast into the eternal fire, because he rejected the salvation which God bestows. In this lies his chief sin. Naturally, if God offers a way of salvation, but a person rejects it, who is at fault when that person perishes?

It goes without saying that here the person himself, who hears the Revelation, the Good News, and does not heed it, bears an enormous responsibility. As Holy Scripture says, whoever knew the will of the

Father and did not act in accordance with it shall be beaten with many stripes. But whoever did not know, but did things deserving of punishment, shall be beaten with few stripes. *And that servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more* (Lk. 12:47–48). Hence, a person who knew Divine Revelation and did not heed the words of God's messengers will be punished. We know from God's Word that without Christ no-one can come to God the Father. The Lord said: … *no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me* (Jn. 14:6). He is the sole mediator between God and men; He is at once both God and Man. And only through Him can one come to the Father. There is no other way to break through to Him. After all, we know that God is one. So how many paths are there to Him?

A: One.

FD: Naturally; there cannot be many paths to God, because He is one, and He is a personality. If He were an impersonal force, then we could talk about there being many paths to Him. But since He is one, this means there is but one path to Him, and this is Christ and union with Christ. For the Church is not merely an assembly of people; it is also a kind of organism — the Body of Christ, as Holy Scripture calls it. The Body of Christ is *the fullness of Him that*

filleth all in all (Eph. 1:23), as the apostle Paul says in his Epistle to the Ephesians.

What, then, is the Body of Christ? All people who are part of the Church of God are related to each other in the same way that the members of one body are related. Take a finger, for instance: can we say that it's the same as an ear? No. Can we say that the finger has nothing to do with the ear? No, they are parts of a single organism, are they not? Yet every organ has its own purpose. In exactly the same way the Church has specific personalities, each completely unique, and each of these personalities has his place, yet these personalities are not unrelated to one another. It's not some collection of atoms bumping up against each other; it is an assembly of people, united to each other by organic bonds, in which another Life is acting — the Life of the Holy Spirit — and it is this that unites them all into a single whole. And this single whole is not some formless thing: it is a body, an organism, of which Christ is the Head. In a literal sense, the source of life proceeds from Him, and the source of sanctity proceeds from Him: He fills to overflowing man's abilities, He strengthens the weak, He supports the infirm. Incidentally, this can even be felt. When people assemble in a place where the Church assembles, there is a sense of relief. I imagine you all sense how you become more at ease in the temple of God? I don't think there is anyone who could fail to sense this kind of thing. Why do you think this is? It is because there is another Life there, the Life of Christ Himself, the Life of God, and it acts in the Church, comforting the heart of every person.

People often ask: "How come I feel this, when I'm not even baptized?" How would you answer that?

A: Because God is there regardless.

FD: God is the Creator of all men; He created everyone. Consequently, no person is a stranger to Christ, if for no other reason than that Christ created him. The whole world was created by Christ, and Christ created every person for Himself. For this reason a person can only find his place in the Church, His Body. Do you see?

Incidentally, this leads to a very important conclusion: if a person thinks he can find himself outside the Church, he literally misses the mark: he commits sin, fails to hit his target. He wants to find himself in a place where he simply is not to be found. It would be like looking for pineapples on the North Pole: you're just not going to find them there.

The Church, being the Body of Christ, is bound by certain links, and it is hierarchical, just as our own body has a certain hierarchy: there is the nervous system, and the circulatory system, and the other systems. In the same way the Church has a sort of "nervous system", so to speak — a system for transmitting information, for transmitting life. This is the system of the episcopate. The Church is headed by bishops, aided by priests and deacons. The bishop is a direct successor of the holy apostles, and possesses full authority in the Church. By this authority he can perform all the sacraments: he can baptize, wed, serve funerals, ordain priests, and join other bishops in ordaining new bishops. In addition, he has the authority of a judge, and all Christians may

be judged by the bishop. Furthermore, if there is a conflict between Christians they must bring their case to the bishop. In general, churched Christians should not sue each other in a secular court of law. Disputes between unchurched people and Christians are another matter.

And then there are things that only a bishop can do. Only he can ordain other priests; only the bishop has the authority to excommunicate from the Church and reinstate those who have fallen away from her. He can also delegate this function to certain others. Finally, a bishop has the authority to consecrate chrism and perform the Great Consecration of churches. This is how his authority is manifested.

The presbyters assist the bishop in his service. The presbyters, or priests as they are also called, are the bishop's assistants, who can also perform all the sacraments except ordination: they baptize, wed, serve funerals, serve the Liturgy, and hear confessions. But they do not possess unilateral authority: they act under the authority of the bishop, who delegates his authority to them. I, for instance, am a priest; the patriarch has delegated that authority to me through ordination.

Finally, there are the deacons, the lowest rank of clergy:[10] they cannot perform any of the sacraments, but they assist during the services. It is their duty to

[10] The deacons are the lowest rank of clergy who receive the sacrament of ordination, called *cheirotonia* ("stretching-out of hands"). There are other ranks of clergy below that of deacon — those of subdeacon and reader (and, in some traditions,

educate the people in the Church, and to assist in charitable work. In the Church, deacons and priests may be married or monastics. Our bishops are aways monastics. Priests and deacons are ordained by the bishop, while bishops are ordained by two or three bishops. This is the standard.

All bishops are equal, all priests are also equal, and all deacons are equal, though they vary in status. The patriarch of Moscow is equal in grace to the bishop of Chukotka, because they share the same rank. In terms of their administrative authority, however, they differ. In the same way there are priests, abbots, archimandrites, and archpriests: all these priests are equal in grace, but administratively they hold different positions. In the same way, deacons vary in their administrative authority, but all are equal in grace.

Thus the Church is arranged, and thus the "fire" of the Holy Spirit is transmitted, through people as through a kind of nervous system.

Now, observe: if we maintain the analogy of the nervous system, we will recall that the nerves are like electrical wires, correct? And the job of electrical wires is to correctly relay a signal, to transmit information. The job of the priests also is to accurately relay the Word of God and grace. For this reason the sacraments a priest performs are valid on the condition that he has not been deposed, and that he be in the Church, and they are valid regardless of his personal sanctity. For example, you can

cantor) — who are ordained by a lesser rite, called *cheirothesia* ("laying-on of hands"). — *Trans.*

make confession to a perfectly holy person, or you can make confession to a sinful priest. Yet unless the priest has been deposed, the grace is identical: your sins will be forgiven just the same. Naturally, a holy person may indeed give better advice. But that pertains more to spiritual guidance. The important thing is that God's power does not depend on the person. If the Church depended on people, it would naturally have fallen apart long ago. But the Church does not depend on people, and it is this that saves her. There are periods of decline in every local Church, and there are periods of resurgence, but God's power always remains the same.

Let's move on now to the properties of the Church. In our Symbol of Faith we say: "I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church". What is the "one Church"?

A: I suppose there's one Church in all the world.

FD: In other words, it is the only one. This is very important, that there is one Church and one alone; there are not two Churches. Why? The answer is clear: there is one Head, one Body. One head cannot have two bodies. Hence, the whole Church is one in its essence, united by the Holy Spirit. How does this inner unity, this profound unity, founded on the unity of God Himself, manifest itself? It manifests itself through four primary factors.

Firstly, the Church is one because it has a single faith in both space and time. In other words, wherever you go you will find the same Symbol of Faith, the same Divine Revelation, the same interpretation of that Revelation, throughout the world. The

universal faith has been preserved as it was received by the apostles, from the beginning to the present. Those parts of the Church that begin to profess another faith, if they persist in this, are called heretics. They commit the grave sin of heresy, and fall away from the Church. The most lamentable and sorrowful example we have of this is the falling away of Catholicism from the Church. We know that the Roman Church was once the first among the churches, the chief of all the churches of the world, but it introduced new teachings, it distorted the teaching about God and the Church, and as a result it fell away from the Church. This happened because of pride: people decided to set God straight, which is completely impermissible. Then, as a result of the fall of Catholicism, various sects arose: the Protestants, followed by others like the Jehovah's Witnesses. The Anglicans in their time fell away from the Catholics, and the Baptists separated from the Anglicans. In other words, Catholicism began to disintegrate, to crumble.

A: But the Baptists believe in God too, don't they?

FD: The Muslims also believe in God. Many people believe in God; the Jews also believe in God. You see, the Baptists rejected the teachings about all the sacraments. They say, for instance, that baptism is not a sacrament; it is merely an oath of allegiance, and not God acting in man. It is merely me promising God: "I solemnly promise to be faithful to Christ." For them, Communion is not union with Christ; it is an act of remembrance, nothing more.

Secondly, the entire Church is united by the unity of its hierarchs. In other words, all the bishops of the universe are united to each other by a single purpose: they interact with each other, and convene at councils of bishops. All these Churches pray for each other. Note that in his prayers at the services the patriarch commemorates the heads of the other local Churches: the patriarchs of Constantinople, Jerusalem, Antioch, Africa ... Why is this? The fact is, administratively our Church consists of fifteen independent institutions. These are also called local churches, or assemblies of the bishops of a given locality. We, for instance, are part of the Russian Orthodox Church. There is also the Orthodox Church of Georgia. There are fifteen in all; let's list them in order. The first is the Orthodox Church of Constantinople (now called Istanbul). Many Christians are part of this Church. Besides Turks, these include Christians living in America, Australia, and a number of other countries of Western Europe. The second of the churches is the Church of Alexandria and All Africa. This Church includes the Orthodox Christians in Africa, and is one of the most rapidly-growing Churches, since a great many tribes in Central Africa are now accepting Orthodoxy, through miracles that have been worked. In 1989 a miracle occurred that moved an entire tribe living near Mount Kilimanjaro to receive Christianity. A missionary, Father Stephan, came and began preaching the Gospel to them, but no-one listened to him. Let me note that this was a completely arid place; water was delivered in tanks. Well, he

got angry, struck the ground with his staff, and water bubbled up from the earth. And the entire nation was baptized in that water; the spring flows to this day.

The next church, the Church of Antioch, of the Near East, includes the Orthodox Christians of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, and the Orthodox Christians of the Arabian Peninsula. Next of the churches is the Church of Jerusalem, the most ancient of the churches — the mother of all churches, whose patriarch receives the Holy Fire that descends from Heaven each year at the Lord's Tomb. The Church of Jerusalem includes the Orthodox Christians of Israel and Jordan.

The fifth church is our own church, which includes the Orthodox Christians of the CIS countries, except for Georgia. Then there are the Georgian Church, the Serbian Church, the Bulgarian Church, the Romanian Church, the Greek Church, the Church of Cyprus, the Albanian Church, the Church of Czechoslovakia, the Church of Poland, and the Church of America. All these Churches are united to each other by unity of sacraments, unity of faith, and unity of hierarchy. And when a common ecclesiastical issue arises, the heads of the Churches meet together and resolve these issues.

Thirdly, the Church is united by unity of the sacraments. You, for instance, will be baptized in Russia, in Moscow, but your baptism will be recognized throughout the universe. Wherever you may be, you can come to any Orthodox Church, anywhere at all — Australia, New Zealand, even Antarctica

(they're building a church there right now) — and you can rest assured that you will be able to confess and commune there, and you will be united in the sacraments. The apostle Paul says this: *For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread* (1 Cor. 10:17).

The Bread of Life, which Christ gives us, is one and the same in all the churches of the world. All the sacraments are the same for all the churches of the world.

Fourthly, all the churches are united by unity of the Law of God. Wherever you may go, you will observe identical moral standards: everywhere you will see that fornication and murder are forbidden, abortions are universally forbidden (certain "churches" even allow abortions); you will see that unnatural perversions are universally forbidden; forbidden also are idol worship and similar blasphemous acts. This is actually quite unusual. Many think this is so everywhere, but this is hardly the case. For example, in the West there are certain sects that permit perversions, in major religious movements, such as the Baptists, or certain of the Anglicans. Or there are places that attempt to allow abortions (murder) and the like. This does not exist in the Orthodox world. All Orthodox Christians are united in their adherence to God's commandments, which they have received and which they will never betray. Again, this unity is not only in space, but also in time: wherever you may go, however deeply you may delve into the past, God's commandments will be the same. As they were given by Christ, so they

are preserved to this day, and so they will be preserved to the end. This is the visible manifestation of the unity of the Church, the manifestation of the life of grace in which it lives.

The second property of the Church, according to the Symbol of Faith, is holiness. Let's break down the word *holy*. What does *holy* mean?

A: Something that has received all light from God.

FD: Yes, you're right: something that has received light and radiance from God. Sinlessness is the effect; the cause is that the water, for example, is permeated with God's energies, God's light: it has become holy. What is a "holy person", or saint? A person permeated with God's light. This is why a halo is depicted around a saint's head. Hence, the Holy Church is permeated with the light of God. As a result, it is beyond the bounds of this world; it is set apart from this world. The Church is the new nation of God — absolutely new. The Church is truly a new, other humanity. As we have already said, here we have people who possess another nature: they possess the human and also the divine, which acts in them. This is why the Church has the power to vanquish any sin and teach every virtue. The Church has the source of its holiness in God Himself, Who lives in her. The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, lives in the Church; He is the breath of the Church. Holiness is bestowed by the Blood of Christ, because Christ is absolutely holy; He is the Righteous One. And Christ communicates this righteousness to men. By whose power, by what means do people attempt to

be righteous outside the Church? "I'm going to do as many good deeds as I can, and I'll become righteous." By their own power. But in the Church it's different: "I'm going to do as many good deeds as I can by the power of Christ, and Christ will make me righteous." Do you feel the difference? This is exactly why Christians meet with success, while non-Christians meet with little. For we frequently see that the proudest people consider themselves righteous men, yet turn out to be perfectly abominable to the Lord.

A: So when you do a good deed, what should you say?

FD: "To the glory of God," always. To the glory of Christ the Savior.

A: Should you say it aloud, or to yourself?

FD: It doesn't matter. But you need to make a point of saying it, so that you realize it. Then it will be a truly good deed.

A: So when you don't say it, it's no longer considered a good deed?

FD: It is good, but it is not of God. It is a good deed by nature, but produces no eternal results, we might say. This makes perfect sense: if you don't want eternal results, you won't receive them. We'll talk about how that takes place another time. You must absolutely say: "To the glory of God."

So now we're faced with the following question: the Church is called holy, since its Head is holy, the Lord's Blood which nourishes it is holy, and the Spirit of God that lives in her is holy. But how can she be holy if there are sinful people within her?

This is a very interesting point. The fact is, the people in the Church are to a greater or lesser degree wrapped up in the life of the Church. For if we commit sin, in so doing we prevent God's power from acting within us. Take our body, for example: if we start to squeeze our finger, the blood stops flowing, and the finger gets red. The harder we squeeze it, the worse it is for the finger. Sin affects our soul just like squeezing the finger affects it. We are members of the Body of Christ, and by committing sin we prevent God's power from entering us. The greater the sin, the harder we are squeezed. But if a person repents, he destroys the blockage, God destroys his sin, and the person again becomes permeated with God's power: he again becomes holy, because his sin has been forgiven.

A: So a person goes and makes confession, is forgiven, and he promptly becomes holy?

FD: When sin is forgiven, that means the "blockage" disappears. Treating the effects of the sin is another matter. If the circulation in your finger is cut off for long, unpleasant changes may occur in the tissue. These will gradually heal. Naturally, certain negative processes can still occur after confession. The sin is forgiven, but the effects of the sin remain (which we will discuss in a moment), and these need to be treated. Or they may not remain, depending on the fervor of the confession.

Sometimes there are sins of which a person does not want to repent — grave sins, yet the person does not repent. For instance, a person distorts Divine Revelation and introduces heresy or blasphemy. Or

he kills someone, and says: "I'm going to go on killing." Or he commits adultery, and says: "I'm going to go on committing adultery." This kind of person falls away from the Church: visibly or invisibly he is cut off from the Church by God. Sometimes a person communes and immediately dies. Sometimes this presents in that people begin feeling poorly in the church: their head begins to ache, they feel stifled, or they begin to feel nauseous. This happens because God's grace strips away their evil deeds. This is why they begin to feel poorly in church. Sometimes it gets to the point that they actually die: they get sick and die. This is because these people have dared to approach God in a state of remorseless sin, and the Light consumes them. Do you see? The same Light is able both to burn and to heal.

There is also the visible judgment of the Church. We have said that the bishop possesses the authority of a judge and can cut off from the Church those who oppose Divine Revelation. An example of this would be the excommunication of Leo Tolstoy. Leo Tolstoy was cut off from the Church and deprived of Christian burial for refusing to believe in a personal God, for blaspheming against Christ the Savior, for blaspheming the Mother of God and Holy Communion. And justly so, because he blasphemed God and refused to repent, so that people would not attempt to follow his teachings, would not think that his teaching were Christian; so they would realize that he was an enemy of God, an enemy of the Church.

Though there was one frightful episode in his life … I'll digress for a moment to tell you just what

a frightful teaching it was that he invented. A year after his death the Tolstoyans gathered at his grave, and during the memorial meeting a viper crawled out of the grave and bit one of the children. The Tolstoyans dug up the grave. It turned out that in the chest area of the corpse a deep passage led into the grave, leading straight to Tolstoy's chest. The snake had made its nest right on his chest there in the grave. Can you imagine?! This was a spiritual sign, that the person who had blasphemed God and was cut off from the Church became a nest for these frightful snakes, as a sign that he was possessed by the enemy.

At the 1994 Episcopal Council all those who patronize sorcerers, psychics, and ritual healers, and those who practice these arts themselves, were excommunicated. Excommunicated were the followers of Roerich and Elena Blavatskaya. In other words, if people adhere to various sectarian teachings they are excommunicated from the Church. The formal decree of the 1994 Episcopal Council was an example of how the Church cuts off from herself those who distort God's Revelation. The excommunicated person cannot commune, cannot even enter God's temple. He cannot be commemorated on commemoration slips, he cannot be given a funeral, he cannot be prayed for[11] — the Church

[11] *I. e.,* the clergy cannot include him by name in the prayers and commemorations of the church services. This does not pertain to one's private prayers in church or at home, nor to the general prayers at the services for the wellbeing, conversion, and salvation of all. — *Trans.*

considers him a stranger, and he is left to God's judgment. And God's judgment is generally swift to come in such cases. We know that those who have warred against God have not ended well. One of the founding fathers of Marxism, Friedrich Engels, died of tongue and throat cancer: the members by which he sinned were the members that were punished.

And so you see that the Church cleanses itself. It cleanses through repentance, and if a person does not wish to repent it cleanses through excommunication. Thus, the Church proves holy despite the fact that there are sinners within her. Repentant sinners are simply treated. Holiness is manifested in treating sin.

The next property of the Church is called *sobornost'* — catholicity. What do you think comprises catholocity? We believe in a catholic Church.

A: *Sobor* comes from *sobirat'*, "to gather together".

FD: Correct. And the Church is indeed *sobornaya*, because it gathers us together: we are gathered together from among all the nations. The word *catholic* means whole, comprehensive. Our Church is called the Catholic Church. The Western church left the word untranslated.

The Church is called "catholic" because it gathers into itself the fullness of Revelation. This is the Revelation that has rested within her throughout the ages, and is sufficient for attaining God. Knowledge outside the Church is unnecessary for our salvation. This revelation is essential for all nations, because in the Orthodox Church there is *neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision,*

Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all (Col. 3:11). In her there is neither Russian, nor Tatar, nor Jew, nor Chukchi, nor Chechen. Any person, if he wishes to be saved, must be a Christian. Any person who does not enter the Church, of any nationality, will perish for eternity. This is why the Church is called "catholic". In the Church there is no nationalism; in the Church people are of one "nationality": Orthodox Christian. Thus the martyrs, when asked at the inquisition, "What is your nationality?" would answer: "My nationality is Christian." And when asked, "Where is your homeland?" — what do you think they answered? "My homeland is in Heaven." In this way they showed the accuracy of their faith. Our homeland is the Heavenly Homeland.

In the Church a person becomes one with all of us. Throughout the ages there has never been a time for which the Church was outdated, since it proceeds from the Eternal God, Who is outside of all time.

Finally, the Church has the power to heal sin of every kind. There is no sin that the Church is incapable of healing. The Church can and does heal drug addiction. The Church can and does heal alcoholism. The Church can and does heal fornication. The Church can heal murder, and heal it she does. All kinds of sin, even the most grave, are healed by the Church.

The Church teaches every kind of virtue, from the very smallest to the very greatest. The Church has all the means required for this, and this is why

she is called "catholic": she is gathered from among all nations, and gathers within herself the fullness of the Truth. As Saint Irineus of Lyons said, "We need not seek Truth outside the Church, into which the apostles placed all that we need for salvation as in a treasury. She is the treasure of the Holy Spirit."

Finally, the fourth property of the Church lies in that she was founded by the messengers of God. It is the apostolic Church. Christ established the Church through the apostles, through his twelve disciples, to whom He gave the gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Thus, the Church is apostolic, because it is guided by the heirs of the apostles, through whom, as through nerve passages, the grace of the Holy Spirit passes to all men. But there is another reason why the Church is called apostolic. The Church has a mission, assigned her by God, which she must accomplish. What is this mission? To bring the Gospel to all the nations of the earth. All people from all ages must hear of Christ, and if they accept the news they will be saved. When the Church has carried out this task, that is, when the news of the Risen Lord has been brought to all the nations of the earth, and all the nations are able to accept Christianity (not that they necessarily will accept it, but all will be able to learn of it), then God will end the history of the world. He will gather all men, foreknown by Him from before the world was, and all men who wish to be saved will receive salvation. God knows all those who wish to be saved, wherever they may be, for God knows the hearts of men, and they are

known to Him alone. Why will He end the history of the world? Because the "harvest" has been gathered. Because the world will be remade, and the Church will reach its end: it will be gathered completely on the day of the resurrection.

The Church consists of several parts: it is not limited to this world alone. Those who have died are also part of the Church. You know that we pray for those who have died because those who have entered the Church do not leave it at the time of their death. The Church is united with God, Who fills the Universe, and He remains God even beyond the grave. This is why a person who enters the Church remains with God even after death. The saints also, meaning the righteous, who have died and have departed from us, pray for those who are on earth. We are all united by the bonds of love; all Christians are united on earth and in the Heavens. People who have sinned but have not fallen away from the Church, even if they have fallen into a place of confinement after death, but were not confined by sin, can be freed by the prayers of the Church. At the divine services we pray and offer commemoration slips for Christians who have died — only for Christians, as those who have believed and been baptized. What if a person was baptized, but did not believe? If he did not believe, how can we help him?

A: So we're not allowed to offer commemorations for atheists?

FD: If they were openly atheists, naturally not. It's another matter in cases where we don't know whether a person was a believer or a non-believer.

You've heard of the legal principle of presumed innocence. In these cases we presume that he was most likely a believer.

A: And if he was a believer, but was not baptized?

FD: Then naturally he is outside the Church. We cannot offer commemoration slips for him. In other words, the Church only prays for its own. An unbaptized person is not in the Body of the Church; he is not with Christ. He is weighed down by the ancient curse of Adam, to whom it was said: … *for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return* (Gen. 3:19). The body turns into dust, but the spirit goes down into the earth — into Hades.

With one exception: even an unbaptized person can be saved if he was executed for Christ. A person like this can be saved even if he was not baptized, because he receives baptism by his own blood.

In addition to people, the Church also includes other beings: the bodiless spirits, the angels. This is why we receive guardian angels at baptism: because they are our brothers, members of the Universal Church, which is not limited to the earth, but encompasses the whole universe. For the Church sanctifies, or blesses, the whole world: it blesses water, and seeds … If you grow cucumbers, know that you can have the seeds blessed, so that God's blessing will be upon the earth. The Church blesses homes, cars, births … There are various kinds of blessings. The Church blesses this world because the world was created by God. Through the Church God's blessing is poured out upon the whole universe.

But in what way, through what "channels", by what means is this uncreated life of God Himself transmitted in the Church? These "channels" are called sacraments. The word *sacrament* means "mystery". In other words, this is a mystical, or sacramental, action of God Himself. A sacrament is a kind of external rite where the outward form conceals the mystical action of God Himself, Who reforms the person entirely. There are seven primary sacraments in the Church. What are these sacraments?

Baptism, without which there is no salvation. The Lord said: *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God* (Jn. 3:5). Man has no sensory organs that would enable him to see, hear, or perceive the light of God. Man is blind and deaf, has no sense of smell or touch; he is naked and does not see God's light; he does not have God's energies within him.

Baptism is truly a sacrament, where a person dies to his old life and is reborn to new life. This is a person's rebirth, his re-creation: man dies to life in sin, and is born to life in righteousness. He dies along with Christ and is resurrected together with Him, and the Spirit of God gives him rebirth. He acquires new sensory organs, new eyes, new ears, that he must then learn to use. Just like when we were little. After baptism we must master the sensory organs we have been given, and use and employ them properly.

How does the sacrament of baptism take place? The most important element of baptism is the triple immersion of a person's body into water while invoking the name of the Father, the Son, and the

Holy Spirit. Why triple immersion? Because the Lord was in the tomb for three days.

In the event of a water shortage or in unusual circumstances a person may be baptized by triple effusion, or sprinkling. But the proper form is triple immersion in water.

A: Can one be baptized a second time?

FD: No. There is only one baptism. The Symbol of Faith says: "I confess (or proclaim aloud) one baptism for the remission of sins."

Baptism is indeed performed but once, because it is a birth: as we are born bodily only once, so also we are born spiritually but once. We are immersed in water because as the Lord was in the tomb, completely in His whole Body, so also man is completely immersed in water and emerges renewed, as though recast by the Holy Spirit.

Why in water? Because in the very beginning, when God created the world, the first thing He created was water. *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters* (Gen. 1:1–2).

And water was given by God for cleansing. By water God cleansed the first world: when the entire world was submerged in fornication, depravity, and profanity He sent down the flood, thereby washing away all sin from the world.

Then God saved the Hebrews from slavery to the Egyptians. How? They passed through water — the Red Sea. It parted, but came back together before

the armies of Pharaoh. When a person undergoes baptism he likewise passes through water, and the enemy perishes in the water. An unbaptized person is in darkness, and the devil lives within his soul, in a very literal sense. You can tell when a person is being "pulled". This happens in various ways: some are pulled into fornication, others into drunkenness or anger. This is the action of the devil.

A: So that doesn't happen to a baptized person?

FD: Not if he doesn't invite him. If he invites him on his own — "Come back to me, devil" — naturally the devil will be delighted to oblige. The Lord said: *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation* (Mt. 12:43–45).

This is why the house must be occupied.

A: Could you explain what "baptism by fire" is?

FD: Baptism by fire is the baptism of those who do not want to be baptized in the name of God: these will be immersed in the eternal fire. This is the lot of all those who do not want to be baptized with the first two baptisms — with water and the Spirit. Those who do not want to receive God's power — Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, atheists — these will be baptized with fire. In other words, they will be cast

into the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. This is baptism by, or immersion into, fire.

The Greek word *baptisma* literally means "immersion", as does the Church Slavonic word *kreshchenie*.

How then does baptism take place? What is the procedure for the sacrament, and what is required for baptism? A prerequisite of baptism is Orthodox faith: without it baptism is impossible. As the apostle Paul says: … *without faith it is impossible to please God* (Heb. 11:6).

Whoever does not believe cannot be baptized. As the Lord said, *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned* (Mk. 16:16).

The standard of the faith is very concise: it is the Symbol of Faith that we all learn by heart. A person who believes contrary to the Symbol of Faith cannot be baptized. If a person enters the water without believing in God or believing incorrectly, and does so consciously, intending to deceive the priest, the water will receive him but the Holy Spirit will not: he will be born dead. He will be born, but stillborn, you understand? A person like this will be dead if he does not believe in God. There have been instances when people who did not believe in God entered the baptismal font with sacrilegious intent. I am aware that certain sorcerers send people to be baptized in order to make a mockery of the sacrament. These people will be punished by God; they naturally derive no benefit from their baptism. For it is impossible to deceive God.

People often ask: how can we baptize infants? We baptize infants according to faith, as well — the faith of their parents and godparents. If the parents and godparents do not believe, the infant cannot be baptized.

I had one instance where I refused to baptize an infant: he was quite healthy, so I wasn't concerned that he might die. I required the parents and godparents to confess the Orthodox faith. I gave them the Symbol of Faith: "As soon as you learn it, I'll baptize the infant immediately, if you agree with what the Creed says." This was because the parents had declared to me that they were atheists, and the godparents said that they didn't believe in God, but that "there did seem to be something out there". I told them that I don't baptize in the name of "something out there"; I baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

What then is required of you? The first requirement is the Orthodox faith. The faith is the Symbol of Faith that you have been given. Faith is conscious, so you must understand every word in the Symbol of Faith. If there is anything you do not understand, be sure to ask. But if, after reading the entire text, there is even one word you are not sure you understand, be sure to ask, so as to understand every word.

As Saint Philaret of Moscow said, if you read the Symbol of Faith but do not understand and receive it in your heart, you are describing a good faith — faith in God, faith in the holy fathers, faith in the holy apostles — but it is not your faith. But when you receive it with your heart, it will be yours.

Naturally, those who are baptized must read God's Word. They must read the New Testament — the four Gospels, the Acts of the Holy Apostles. There are other books that ought to be studied, such as the Book of Genesis. Formerly, the Church canons required that catechesis (preparation for baptism) last for 40 days. This is the proper standard for Christian life, when a person begins preparing for baptism. Unless he is sick, he prepares for baptism for 40 days: he recalls his sins recalls, and begins fasting intensively for three days prior to baptism, not eating meat or dairy products; he prays to God, except for "Our Father", since a person may only pray the Lord's Prayer after baptism, seeing as a person is only born to God at the moment of baptism. Then he is adopted to sonship by God, born to God.

An unbaptized person may make the sign of the cross. An unbaptized person may and must go to church on Sundays, and remain until the words: "As many as are catechumens, depart". In other words, catechumens are those who are not yet baptized, who listen to the Word of God. You must remain until that moment, listening to the Word of God: listen to the sermon, if there is one; then listen to the prayer that is offered up for you; then, after the words "As many as are catechumens, depart", you must leave. After this the service for those who are already baptized begins.

The unbaptized may venerate the icons. However, an unbaptized person may not drink holy water or eat prosphora, because these are holy

things related to Communion, and a person may not receive Communion until he has been baptized. Prosphora (which in the Greek means *offering*) are specially-shaped loaves of bread that are used at the Liturgy.

Baptism itself consists of the following elements. If a person has been part of another religious movement — if he was a member of a sect, or was a Muslim, a Jew, or a pagan — prior to baptism that person must absolutely recant his former delusions (Islam, Judaism, *etc.*).

There is a special right of recantation that must take place before baptism. If you have previously declared yourself a Muslim, you must renounce specific errors in Islam, such as the belief that God is supposedly single — we believe that God is a trinity.

A: Does one recant in writing?

FD: No, orally. And the belief that Muhammad is a prophet.

A: Why wasn't Mohammed a prophet?

FD: Mohammed was a prophet, but not of God, if for no other reason than that he distorted God's Revelation: he did not believe in the crucifixion of Christ, which the true prophets had long ago foretold. He did not believe in Christ's Resurrection from the dead. Can a true prophet really say that God commands us to do evil, that God is the source of both good and evil? God cannot contradict Himself. It would be impossible for God to reveal one thing to Moses, David, and Isaiah, for Christ and His apostles to witness to the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and then for a "last

prophet" to surface and begin preaching something else, turning everything inside out.

And could a true prophet receive "revelations" by falling on the ground, writhing and foaming at the mouth? Are these the actions of a true prophet? Or are they the actions of some other being? This is precisely how Mohammed received his revelations: he would fall on the ground in a fit, foaming at the mouth, and then would receive his "revelation".

The vision he saw on Mount Hiba was a demonic vision. Think back, if any of you here were once Muslims: he saw a huge black spirit stretching up to the heavens, who began to strangle him, forcing him to read. Mohammed said: "I don't know how to read," but the spirit forced him. Only when Mohammed agreed did he begin to receive "revelations".

God is not like this; God does not strangle people. Can you imagine coming here to be baptized, and suddenly having some mysterious power attack you and begin to strangle you? This is impossible. The Creator doesn't treat His creation like this. Incidentally, it's interesting to note that when Mohammed received his revelation he believed he was possessed, but his own wife, Khadijah, convinced him otherwise.

A person must recant his former convictions, and any adult must repent of his sins, so as not to repeat them again. All sins are forgiven when a person is submerged in the water of baptism. His sins will be forgiven even if he has not confessed them, but if he has not repented of them it will be easier

for him to slip back into them. This is why we make certain to hear a person's confession.

A: What if a person doesn't remember his sins?

FD: All sins are washed away, but you must absolutely confess the sins you remember, so as not to repeat them. The purpose of this is to repent of them, to ask God's forgiveness, and to be reconciled to God. This is why the Lord says through the apostle Peter: *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost* (Acts 2:38).

It is for this reason that the Church has always maintained this rule: first a person repents, and then he is baptized. This is the most proper approach. The only people we baptize without repentance are infants, because they have no personal sins, though they do have original sin.

What happens next is this. The infant is given a name, and the naming prayer is read. Incidentally, you should know that even if you have a name that is in the calendar you can change it. Of course, you don't have to. If you do not have a Christian name, the priest usually selects one. If a person has a Christian name, he is usually baptized with that name. Regardless of whether we change our name or not, however, the person now has a new name. Why? Firstly, it is written by God in the Book of Life. Secondly, a person's name links him to one of the saints. In other words, that person obtains a heavenly friend in Heaven: a holy namesake, who takes considerable care for that person, and whose feast

day becomes that person's primary personal feast: his nameday. On that day, the day your saint is commemorated, you must absolutely commune, and then celebrate.

So when you are baptized, be sure to ask the priest to tell you whose name you were baptized with, because sometimes there are many saints in the calendar with the same name.

After this follows the exorcism, or the rite of casting out evil spirits. The devil is driven out of people, and the Church pronounces two prayers[12] addressed not to God, but to the devil. In brief, they are saying: "Get out, and don't ever show your face around here again!" And the devil leaves.

This frequently occurs visibly. I had an instance where I baptized a woman who was a drug addict. She began to feel very unwell after these prayers. She started having trouble breathing while she was reading the Symbol of Faith, and she lost consciousness during the baptism, but I refused to take the bait: I immersed her, and after the third immersion she immediately came around, because the devil had left her. This is a vivid example of how he works.

If you have ever been at a child's baptism, you know that small children sometimes begin to yell loudly at this point. This is because their parents have lived dishonorably; hence, the devil exercises a strong influence over the children.[13] Anyone can see

[12] The exorcism addressing the devil is not a prayer; the term is used here incorrectly. — *Trans.*

[13] This opinion of the author should be cited with discretion, so as not to deter parents from bringing their children to

this occur in the church. It is caused by the action of the devil.

The devil is driven out of the person. After the devil has been cast out of the person, that person is invited to renounce him. The priest asks: do you wish to renounce Satan, all his works, and all his angels? Satan's works are evil works, and Satan's angels are the spirits that pass themselves off as pagan gods, that pass themselves off as cosmic energies.

Before baptism, after the exorcism of evil spirits, you renounce Satan, all his works, all his angels, all his pride, and all his service.

A: What is Satan's service?

FD: Satan's service is all false religions. In addition to false religions there are also magic, sorcery, astrology, and so forth. And finally, "all his pride".

What is "Satan's pride"? This is Satan's pomposity — huge spectacles in which the devil takes pride. Picture, if you will, a crowd leaving a soccer game, smashing everything in its path. Who do you think is behind them?

A: The devil.

FD: Naturally. Isn't that so? When a person has an uncontrollable desire to deface everything, obviously the devil is behind this. Or a person leaving a rock concert, his eyes wild, screaming something inarticulate. Who's behind him? The devil. For the devil is very proud of this; he dances and rejoices.

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baptism for fear that their children might begin to cry at this particular point and incur their censure. — *Trans.*

A person goes to a nightclub, to do drugs and get drunk. Who do you think is pleased by this?

In Moscow there was a saint, Basil the Blessed, a fool for Christ's sake, who made himself out to be insane, behaving like this so that no-one would praise him. He possessed the gift of prophecy. One time he went up to a bar and began kissing the outside corners. The people asked him: "Why are you kissing the walls of the bar?" He replied: "The guardian angels are standing here and weeping."

You see? But the devil rejoices in these bars. This is why a person must renounce this pride, these spectacles in which he will no longer participate.

As for sports, you are no doubt aware that the Church has always approved of solo sports — physical education, skiing, riding bikes and the like, but solo. But the Church has always been against team sports that are detrimental to the sportsman's own health and cause serious physical damage. There is a very clear division: we support what is good for your health, and God the Creator did not create man just to have him damage himself. You know that many sportswomen, for instance, are unable to have children.

Then, after the person being baptized renounces the devil, he blows and spits upon him, toward the west, because the west is a symbol of the vale of darkness. Thus, we shove him away, blowing and spitting upon him, to break with him for good.

Then we turn to face the east, lower our hands as a sign of humility before the face of God, and promise to be faithful to Christ. The priest asks: "Do you

wish to be united with Christ?" And you answer: "I do." The priest says: "And do you believe in Him?" "I believe in Him as King and God," you reply. Then the person being baptized takes a solemn oath of allegiance to Christ: he reads the Symbol of Faith. After he has read the Symbol of Faith, the sacrament itself begins.

The priest puts on white garments, as a sign of joy, because one of the names for baptism is "enlightenment" — permeation with light. He lights three candles above the font, as a sign that the baptism is taking place in the name of the Holy Trinity. The water is blessed and censed, and becomes permeated with the power of the Holy Spirit. The person being baptized is anointed with blessed oil, that he might slip through the devil's hands. The person undresses and descends into the water, and the priest immerses him three times in the water with the words: "The servant of God (Name) is baptized in the name of the Father, amen" — and the person submerges the first time. "And of the Son, amen" — and he submerges the second time. "And of the Holy Spirit, amen" — and he submerges fully into the water for the third time.

Why am I telling you this? Some people try to jump out of the water after the first immersion, waving their hands around. Don't do that. No-one's going to drown you; it's not deep. Immerse yourself fully; everything will be fine.

A: Is the person immersed in his baptismal robe?

FD: No, the baptismal robe is put on later. The person is immersed naked. Let me tell you how I do it, so that neither men nor women feel uncomfortable. I ask everyone to bring large bath towels. The person first undresses to their underwear or bathing suit. I anoint them with oil, and the person spreads the oil over themselves, to slip through the devil's hands, and to receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Then I turn away, and the person enters the water and undresses fully. I immerse him three times, then I hold out a towel. The person comes out, and I wrap him in a towel, put the cross on him, and dress him in the baptismal robe.

At the moment when you submerge into the water, all your sins will be forgiven: original sin is forgiven, as well as all your personal sins, and you will be suffused with the light of God. You will come out and you will be clothed in a white garment as a sign of your soul's purity. This is the first holy thing you will receive. You will be given a candle as a sign that your spirit has now begun to burn before God, and as a reminder to *let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven* (Mt. 5:16).

You will also be given a cross to wear as a sign that you will bear sorrows for Christ's sake. *If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me* (Mt. 16:24).

You must never take off your cross — not when you bathe, nor when you sleep.

A: Do you need to buy a cross and have it blessed?

FD: If you purchase it in a church, it is already blessed. If not, it must be blessed at a moleben.

A: Do you need godparents?

FD: Godparents are required for children up to 14 years old. After that, if you have close friends who can vouch for you, who are not and will not become related to you, this would be a good thing. If a godparent will help you become more churched in the future, this would be a good thing.

The cross is never removed. Not when you bathe, not when you swim, not in the sauna — never. It is a fact, for instance, that suicides are almost never found wearing their crosses. A forensic pathologist of my acquaintance knows from experience that suicides are hardly ever found wearing their crosses. In other words, the devil cannot destroy a person completely without first forcing him to remove his cross. The cross is our protection; never remove it for any reason.

Immediately after the sacrament of baptism another sacrament is performed: the sacrament of chrismation, the sacrament of the Holy Spirit. The person is imbued with the power of Eternal Life, and he enters into a personal relationship with God, which will never again be repeated: he stands before his Creator face to face. A prayer is read, and the person is anointed with blessed chrism — a fragrant oil consecrated by His Holiness the Patriarch. The forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, ears, breast, hands, and feet are anointed. On these parts of the body crosses are traced with the blessed chrism, which are then wiped off at the end of the rite of chrismation.

Through chrismation God's power enters a person; he is given the power to do truly good works.

Remember, we talked about true good works verses false good works. True good works are done by the power of the Holy Spirit, which is invested in a person, and this Holy Spirit is within you from the moment of your baptism. You need only fan Him, like a flame, for this "seed" to sprout and grow within you into the tree of Eternal Life.

After chrismation the person walks around the font three times to the words of the apostle Paul: "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, alleluia". *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ* (Gal. 3:27). Praise Him Who is, has ever been, and ever shall be — praise the One that is, as a sign that we are in eternal union with Christ.

After this, excerpts are read from the Epistles and the Gospel, describing the meaning of baptism. In our church baptism is often combined with the Liturgy, so the person communes immediately. But even if baptism is not combined with the Liturgy, you must commune of the Holy Mysteries of Christ without delay.

Naturally, no-one communes prior to baptism. What is Communion? This is the Church's most important sacrament — the heart of the life of the Church. It is the greatest Mystery of Mysteries that we have, and hence is called "the Holy Mysteries". It is a great Mystery of Love, where in the form of bread and wine the very Body and Blood of the Lord enter into us: the Lord Himself in His Body and Blood,

and in His immortal soul, resurrected together with His resurrected body, enters into us together with His divinity, transforming and remaking us. We become transfigured members of Christ's Body. Not in the way that ordinary food transforms inside us; when the Body of Christ enters us we become a part of Christ's Body.

One should commune as often as possible: not less frequently than once a month, and the more often the better. But not more often than once a day. You may commune every day, if you prepare.

Usually those who commune once a month must prepare as follows: by fasting for three days and reading three canons — to Christ, the Mother of God, and one's guardian angel — followed by the Rule for Communion. On the day before you must be at the evening service, and repent of your sins. On the day of communion you must come on an empty stomach, not eating or drinking anything after midnight.

A: And not confess again?

FD: No, not if you confessed the evening before. The more often a person communes, the less he fasts. The prayer rule, however, remains the same.

What next? What is repentance? It is a sacrament where a person tells his sins in the presence of a priest, asks God's help never to repeat them, promises to make every effort not to repeat them, and acknowledges his guilt, and God forgives him these sins and gives him the strength not to repeat them. This is truly a sacrament, one that helps to heal sins committed after baptism.

For serious sins a person is given a penance — a kind of treatment, consisting of a prayer rule, or being barred from Communion for a time, or specific charitable works, to help the person heal their soul of the consequences of the sin. Why are penances needed? Imagine you've been hit by a bullet. The bullet has been extracted, leaving a wound. The wound needs to heal, and so it needs to be treated with various special medications. A penance is a medication. Repentance removes the bullet, but if the wound is a large one it needs to be treated. This is why a priest may prescribe a prayer rule, or a certain number of prostrations, or bar the penitent from Communion for a time: all this is to heal the person of their sin. The priest mentions this at confession. If a person has committed mortal sins, it is sometimes helpful to ask a penance yourself.

A: But the Bible says that to God all sins are the same.

FD: No, the Bible says specifically that there are different kinds of sins. The apostle John the Theologian says this: *If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death* (1 Jn. 5:16–17). What is "sin unto death"? Sins unto death degrade a person so badly that if that person dies while continuing in that sin he goes straight to hell, because he is no longer capable of meeting God, unless he repents.

A: If you sell your cross, is that a serious sin?

FD: Of course; a very serious sin.

A: What does one need to do to remedy a sin like that?

FD: A penance is needed, but we should talk about that privately. Penances, like medicine, are prescribed on an individual basis; they cannot be applied the same way for everyone. We will talk about sins specifically next time; I don't want to go into the subject in detail right now. Let me just say that the sin of, say, offending someone and the sin of killing someone are two different sins.

A: What kind of sin is stealing?

FD: A serious sin. In some cases it can even be a mortal sin.

A: So it's equal to murder?

FD: Yes, to murder. This makes perfect sense, because stealing frequently leads to murder.

Now, about the sacrament of marriage. When people want to enter into Christian marriage, a man and a woman, they must absolutely have a church marriage. In this sacrament a person receives the strength for establishing a Christian family: the husband becomes an image of Christ, and the wife — an image of the Church. The man becomes the head of the family, and the woman becomes the body. The head is the person responsible for the family, the person who thinks through everything, the person who is the wife's protector; hence the Russian word for married (for a woman): *zamuzhem* — "behind the man". And the wife is the person who supports and strengthens her husband. This is essentially why it

should be this way in Christianity. Strength is given for raising children in God, strength so that love will not die, but will burn ever stronger. Naturally, these strengths may be put to use, or they may not. So having a church marriage is no guarantee that people will live together forever.

You know that marriages in the Church rarely dissolve, as there are few occasions for divorce. There is marital infidelity, or attempted murder, if the woman has an abortion without her husband's knowledge. For here she becomes a murderess, by killing her own child. In these cases divorce is permitted, and the husband may marry again, unlike the wife.

A: So the wife can no longer marry?

FD: No, because she is the guilty one.

A: What about miscarriages?

FD: No, a miscarriage is not murder. We're talking about conscious murder — abortion. If the husband knows about the intended abortion, they are both guilty, and naturally there is no grounds for divorce. There are other instances, as well: serious psychiatric illness or drug addiction, for example. But the Church does not divorce people just because of personality conflicts.

The Church permits second and third marriages. Of this the apostle Paul states specifically, the Bible states specifically, that second and third marriages are permitted out of condescension, for widows and widowers and in the case of lawful divorce. *I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain,*

let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn (1 Cor. 7:8–9).

Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you (1 Cor. 7:27–28).

I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some are already turned aside after Satan 5:14–15).

There is a special rite for subsequent marriages, but it is penitential rather than celebratory.

A: It's not considered fornication?

FD: No, it's not a sin, but it's not as good as a first marriage.

Even better than marriage is virginity, monasticism, when a person loves God so greatly that he is willing to preserve his virginity for His sake.

A: So a nun can't get married?

FD: Of course not; otherwise she would be breaking her oath. She has given herself entirely to God. Monasticism is the higher path, but it is not for everyone; you can't force everyone to be monks.

A: If a woman was married before, can she no longer become a nun?

FD: Yes, she can. If she hasn't yet raised her children she cannot; that is, she cannot desert what God has entrusted to her directly.

The next sacrament in the Church is the sacrament of unction, or the blessing of oil. This is a sacrament in which a person is given strength for

the healing of physical illnesses; it is a sacrament of healing. Many do not know this, and misunderstand the sacrament, but it is specifically for healing. If a person is ill, he must ask the priests, and the priest will anoint him with oil, and the person will be healed. In my own pastoral practice there have been multiple cases when people recovered even after a stroke. There was one person who suffered a massive stroke, then after receiving unction he was back on his feet within two weeks, coming to church. Do you understand what a massive stroke is? The person is left bedridden, completely paralyzed.

This is precisely why the sacrament was given. There is a tradition of receiving unction every Great Lent, even for people who are not seriously ill. But this tradition is not obligatory. What is obligatory is to receive unction if a person has fallen seriously ill. Unction heals not only a person's body, but also his soul. To this end it recalls forgotten sins to mind: the person remembers the sins that were committed and repents of them, and these sins cease to affect the person. The sins the person committed in ignorance cease to degrade him.

Finally, the next sacrament is the sacrament of ordination, where through the laying on of hands by the bishop a person receives the strength to serve God in the Church, acquiring the ability to transmit the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Not everyone can be a priest. In our Church only men can be priests, and only those who have not committed mortal sins after baptism. In other

words, people who have murdered, committed fornication, or stolen cannot be priests.

A: What if someone killed in the army or in a war?

FD: Strictly speaking this is against the rules, though naturally this is not considered murder. There are exceptions, but according to the church canons it is not allowed. If a person has committed a grave sin, this is an obstacle to ordination.

Other obstacles to ordination include instances where a priest's wife has not preserved her virginity before marriage, where the candidate for ordination has remarried, or where he is his wife's second husband. The wife of a priest must be a virgin or must have preserved her virginity after baptism. If she lost her virginity prior to baptism, but has preserved her purity thereafter, she may certainly become a priest's wife. Likewise, if she was married before baptism, and after baptism preserved her purity until entering her second marriage, she may become a priest's wife. For all one's life prior to baptism is nonexistent; it is simply gone. Only the good works done before baptism are preserved: they remain, but everything else disappears.

Priests and deacons are subject to the bishops. Only monks can be bishops, and they are consecrated by two or three bishops at the discretion of the Patriarch.

Such are the standards of the Church, and such are the sacraments of the Church.

The Church offers a specific rhythm of life: we have our own principles, our own particular rhythm

of life, a different rhythm from that of this world. For instance, what rhythm do young people have? They sleep, they eat, they go to class, they go and "get down" at a nightclub. This rhythm is just a bit different from our own. We have our own rhythm: a Christian wakes up in the morning and says his prayers, so that first thing in the morning all his evil intents are destroyed for the rest of the day. If he wants to eat, what does he do? He reads "Our Father", and invariably makes the sign of the cross over his food. Before eating he does not forget to take a drink of holy water and eat a piece of prosphoron or antidoron. It is a good thing to anoint oneself with oil, to light candles and oil lamps during prayers, to have an "icon corner". In general, the homes of Christians are usually lit. On the east wall of the house an "icon corner" is situated, containing the icons.

After the person eats, what does he do? He does not forget to give thanks to God: "We thank Thee, O Christ our God ..." He reads the thanksgiving prayer after eating, because one must not be ungrateful. After all, it is said: "[All food] is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

If a person does a good work, before beginning he prays: "O Lord, help me!" If a Christian undertakes a good work, he first reads "O Heavenly King". If it is an important work, he goes to church and requests a moleben for a good work. For instance, there is a prayer before traveling. If you want to go somewhere, somewhere far away, or fly on an airplane, you go to church and ask the priest, and he

reads a prayer of blessing for your trip. You can simply ask him to bless you on your journey. And he blesses you, and you go on your trip. And if you say: "I need a prayer for a journey," the priest will read the prayer before a journey.

Before giving birth you receive Communion, go the priest, and say: "I need the prayer before giving birth to be read." There are also prayers for blessing seeds, and for blessing work in the garden, for building a house, and so on — for every kind of good work.

We don't pray before evil works, because we're not going to do them.

In the evening before sleep we read the "Prayers Before Sleep", so that we may be sanctified, and so the Lord will preserve us that night.

How do you begin to pray? Buy a prayer book and a small Church Slavonic dictionary, and adopt the following rule: to begin with, don't read the entire rule at once, as Saint Theophan the Recluse advised. Read several prayers, working through them ahead of time, so as to understand every word, and pray these prayers. Then add another prayer, after understanding each word of it completely. Then add another, and so on for the entire rule. Don't stop until you have begun praying the entire rule, so that your mind processes it entirely. For the Bible says: *I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue* (1 Cor. 14:19).

Why do we pray in Church Slavonic? To distance our mind from everyday words. You see? From

ordinary associations. Georgians can pray in Georgian, Tatars can pray in Tatar; that goes without saying. If a person's native language is not Russian, he can pray in his native language, but using the prayers the Church has blessed. You can also pray in your own words; naturally, no-one condemns this kind of prayer. One need only remember that we must pray to God in the name of Jesus Christ, that is, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, without fail, because otherwise our prayer will not be heard.

What else is read, besides the morning and evening prayers? Christians read the Word of God every day. Each day without fail we read at least one chapter of the Gospel, two chapters from the Epistles, and at least a few psalms. This is obligatory. But it is a very good thing to read the Old Testament as well, a little at a time. Study the Word of God and live by it.

Now about this rhythm. Two days of each week are fast days. We fast without fail on Wednesday, when we remember the Lord's betrayal by Judas, and on Friday, when we remember His crucifixion. We do not eat meat or dairy products during each of the fasts, and outside the time from Pascha to Pentecost on Wednesdays and Fridays we do not eat fish on fast days, unless it is a feast day.

There are also four major fasts. Seven weeks before Pascha, Great Lent begins — a strict fast, during which we only eat fish twice. Then there is the Saints Peter and Paul Fast, which begins a week after Pentecost and lasts until July 12. Then the Dormition

Fast, lasting from August 14 to August 27; this is also a strict fast. The Saints Peter and Paul Fast is a relaxed fast, where fish is allowed, but the Dormition Fast is a strict fast; fish is not permitted. Finally there is the Nativity Fast, a relaxed fast, beginning November 28 and lasting until January 6. We keep these fasts by refraining on these days from the specific types of food that I have named. Our excess, the money we have to spare, we give to the poor. We dedicate more time to charitable works.

Another reason we are unable to fast is because we don't go to church. Naturally, this is impossible: if a person doesn't go to church, his fast is for naught. Experience has proven this.

On Saturday evening and Sunday morning, where do we spend our time? In church, without fail. There are three conditions under which we may not come to church: if we are in a town where there is no church; if we are paralyzed or we have a temperature of 104, and we feel terrible; or if we are in prison — hopefully for the sake of the name of Christ the Savior.

In these cases we may not come to church. In all other cases we must be in church. If we go to stay at our summer cottage, we find a nearby church. If there is no service there in the evening, we must at least be in church the next morning.

And remember: from Saturday evening until Sunday evening we cease all work: we occupy ourselves with none of our own affairs except for good works.

We also celebrate Pascha and the twelve major feasts of the Church: the Nativity of the Most-holy Theotokos, the Exaltation of the Cross of the Lord, the Entry of the Most-holy Theotokos into the Temple, the Nativity of Christ, the Baptism of the Lord, the Meeting of the Lord, the Annunciation, the Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem, the Ascension of the Lord, Pentecost, the Transfiguration of the Lord, and the Dormition of the Most-holy Theotokos. These are the twelve major feasts. On these days we come to church without fail: even if we're working we come to the early service, but we absolutely celebrate the feast. Of course, if at all possible it is better not to work on these days. And naturally we must keep the other feasts, as we are able and as necessary.

It is a good practice — not obligatory, but I suggest it to you out of practicality, to make life easier — to come to church as often as possible, whether or not there is a service. Stand there for five minutes, take deep breaths of God's air, light a candle, bow, and go on about your business.

As for what must take place inside a person, how a person must grow inwardly, how he must fight against sin, how he must cultivate the virtues — that will be our topic next time.

ON THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD

FATHER DANIEL: Today we are going to talk about the Lord's commandments: what is good and what is bad from the standpoint of the Orthodox Church. How do you determine this in your day-to-day lives?

ATTENDEE: There are various norms, the ones described in every schoolbook; they're the ones people observe. For instance, it makes perfect sense that it's good to give money to help those in need. This is probably one of the most important things a person can do: charity.

FD: What about, say, the work of the heroine mafia, that does charitable work specifically to help people break their addiction to heroine, just so they can get them hooked again? Is that good or evil? This is an actual situation we encounter. And this is also charity, you know. But it is outward, formal charity.

There are all kinds of norms. For instance, in our society there exists a perfectly horrific norm: having abortions. And a good many people think there is nothing wrong with this. Do you think, from a normal person's point of view, that this can be an accepted norm — to kill other people? To kill a perfectly innocent person — a weak, helpless little person?

A: But there's another point of view: many think that if the mother won't be able to keep the baby fed …

FD: … she ought to kill him.

A: "Why let him suffer?" is the frequent justification.

FD: An interesting justification indeed. Let's take it a step further: suppose a person gets sick, and it's very difficult to feed him. So you know what we'll do? We'll kill him, that's what! The ancient Yakuts did just that. Before they accepted Christianity, the custom in Yakutia was to take old people out into the tundra and leave them there to starve. And this was considered the norm. Who needs an extra mouth to feed? He can't work; he's of no benefit to society. You can't keep him fed. Better for him to be eaten by wolves. There was another tribe in the southern foothills of Ural, where when a person's parents grew old and feeble the custom was to strangle and eat them. That way the meat didn't go to waste, and the person was of "benefit" to society.

What does this tell us? It tells us that societal norms are highly subjective. In normal societies until recent times abortion was punishable by death, or by exile for ten years, as it used to be in the Russian Empire, for example. Yet today abortion is considered the norm, and even a human right. I could never understand, and still cannot, how this could be classified as a human right. Or, for example, until very recently the norm in practically every country was for fornication and homosexuality to be considered crimes — crimes against the state, mind you, and they were also punishable either by death or by long prison sentences. But now these too are considered the norm: fornication is even celebrated in

millions of songs. Societal norms have changed. Do you think any of this has changed the truth?

A: It shouldn't.

FD: And that is exactly why I put the question this way. Because using this approach, where good and evil are determined by society, good and evil turn out to be relative concepts. Yet it is man's nature to treat good and evil as absolute values. People subconsciously think this way, without deliberately thinking it through: they condemn evil, and justify good. In other words, in any given situation any given person, in whatever society he may live, will always try to do more good than evil. Why is this? It is because good and evil are determined in a very particular way. Good, from a Christian standpoint, is following the will of God, while evil is violation of God's will. Furthermore, from a Christian standpoint, good is a description of God's attributes, the attributes of the essence of God Himself. We believe specifically that God is chaste, pure, meek, and humble; that God is love. Hence, a person who does good thereby comes to resemble God. Conversely, a person who does not do good comes to resemble the enemy of the human race. Here it is worth mentioning that while evil is an attribute and the essence of God Himself, evil has no independent essence. This is very important to remember, because many people say: "I got drunk because of that awful vodka," or, for example, "I became a drug addict because of that awful opium." Can we say that vodka is bad?

A: We can if it's bad-quality vodka!

FD: That's if it's bad-quality. But is good-quality vodka bad or good?

A: That depends on how you use it.

FD: Correct. In other words, there is nothing essentially bad about it. This is a very important Christian standard. Yet many people attempt to declare things to be essentially bad. They say: "This is a bad thing to do, essentially bad." Or, for instance, people say a certain personality trait is also essentially bad. This is not the case: evil has no essence.

A: What about cigarettes?

FD: Tobacco itself is actually a plant, which can be used for medicinal purposes, while smoking is an abuse of tobacco. In the same way narcotics are good for use as pain killers, but bad when used for other purposes. From a Christian standpoint, any evil at all is a perversion of good. You've probably never met a single person who would say of himself that he is perfectly good, without a trace of evil. Such people are extremely rare, almost non-existent. They may make a show of doing so, but the moment you start pointing out their negative traits they begin to protest: they will always attempt to make excuses, to explain their behavior. No-one considers evil to be good, because it goes without saying that it is bad. And people themselves understand, without having to prove it to them, that we need to do good. For instance, why is it bad to kill? Many haven't even thought about it, though probably everyone would say that killing is bad. Why is it bad to kill?

A: Because you can't take another person's life.

FD: Why is that?

A: I don't know; you just can't.

FD: You see? The standard is there, but we frequently don't realize the reason. Naturally, there is a reason, and it is connected with God. Why mustn't we kill? Because by doing so you usurp God's right: only the One who gave the life may take it away. This is the spiritual root.

A: But the mother also gave life to the baby. So that means she has the right to kill it.

FD: The mother did not give life to the child. No mother has ever given life to anyone. The mother is only the instrument through which God gives life. After all, you can't give life to just anyone; you can't bring something you make to life, can you? In order to give life you have to create the fundamental particles, then create atoms from them, then molecules from the atoms, then create a cell from the molecules and bring it to life. No-one can do this but God, because God is the source of life. Hence, a person who takes a life is naturally violating God's law.

Now let's talk about what sin is. Sin is revolt against God; sin is lawlessness. Sin is violation of God's Law; hence, sin is the blood relation of death. Why? Because the Law was created for life.

There are ten commandments: honor God; make no idol; do not take God's name in vain; keep the Sabbath — work six days, but set apart the seventh to the Lord God; honor your parents; do not kill; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; and do not covet. If everyone on earth kept these commandments, do you think life would be better or worse?

A: Better, of course.

FD: Yes, there would be no wars, families wouldn't break up …

A: That would be boring.

FD: I don't know; I would prefer that kind of boring.

A: When the subject comes up, many people say things would be boring then.

FD: I wouldn't say that. This is a very serious error, and it comes from people thinking that sin is the spice of life. Forbidden fruit is always sweeter, as they say. But if sin is lawlessness, it consequently leads to death. The Bible says that sin is gnashing of teeth, screaming, and howling. *And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me; and if not, I will know* (Gen. 18:20–21). In Sodom the people committed sins against nature, and God went to see how the people were behaving in Sodom. Sin is fornication. Sin is anguish, sin is depression, sin is hatred, sin is spite. Sin is decay, rot, pain, and destruction. And this is the spice of life?! Sin is sickness. Would life be boring without sickness? Imagine if no-one were sick, if there was no flu … goodness, how would we get along without the flu? I really can't imagine! The idea that sin is a beautiful thing is false. People have no idea of the truth; they don't even stop to think about what they're saying.

Take our real, everyday lives — not TV life, but real life. For instance, a man cheating on his wife, or

a woman on her husband: is that beautiful? A person secretly cheats on his spouse, deceiving and lying, because he's afraid of everything: he's left feeling filthy; the family is in an uproar, beset by suspicions, quarrels, and fights. The children are miserable … and this is good?! Unless you gloss it over, it's a pretty dismal picture. There is nothing good about it. Sin is lawlessness; sin is what destroys a person. One who violates the law of nature will perish. If a person jumps off a sixteen-story building it will kill him, because he violated the law of nature, which was naturally established by God. And a person who violates God's commandment not to commit adultery will perish in the same way. Furthermore, a direct link can be traced between sin and sickness. Doctors have found from experience that alcoholics contract cirrhosis, and prideful people are afflicted with insanity, frequently with schizophrenia. People who are always thinking about the future, who are always worrying — from the Church's standpoint, people who are just plain irritable — these people contract stomach ulcers. Arrogant, power-hungry people suffer from heart disease. Modern medicine is familiar with even more significant problems. Envious people are at risk of developing cancer. This connection is easily traceable between a number of diseases. This doesn't mean that every person who develops cancer is an envious person. What it does mean is that an envious person most likely will. For a person's soul and body comprise a single whole. If a person is ashamed, his face gets red. Of course, this rarely happens today, but

it used to; some may still remember it. There used to be such a feeling as shame. If a person is happy he smiles; his face is radiant. The soul is linked to the body; this is natural. Hence, both sin and good affect a person.

A: So sickness is always brought on by sin?

FD: Not always. Sickness can occur for other reasons — for example, because God permits it for the glory of God, to glorify His name through the miracle of healing. Sickness can occur to prevent sin.

A: What if a child gets sick?

FD: This is sometimes caused by the sins of his parents.

A: But what did the child do to deserve that?

FD: It's very simple. Let me give you an example of how it happens: suppose the parents do drugs, and they give birth to a sick child. Whose fault is that?

A: But why should the child have anything to do with his parents?

FD: Because every person is not a closed-off, autonomous system. Of course, he's not responsible for his parents' sins, and will not be judged for them, but he naturally suffers the consequences of his parents' sins. This occurs because people are very closely connected to each other. Late humanism is under the delusion that people are separate atoms that have no contact with each other. No, all are connected to each other in a single body. This is why any sin reflects on all of creation, corrupting all of creation. On the other hand, any good work improves all of creation. In other words, no evil or

good work is ever confined to a single person: it will spread beyond. And sin, according to the Church's teaching, has several stages of development. And you must choose: will you fight against sin after holy baptism, or not?

A: We'll try.

FD: Why do I ask? Because if a person does not want to fight against sin, why be baptized? After baptism the fight against sin changes completely: God's aid is present, but the attacks also intensify.

A: These days, if a person doesn't sin people in society may not understand him.

FD: That's their problem. If a person has jaundice and demands that everyone else paint themselves yellow, that's his problem. Our task is to follow after God. Trying to please society is the sin of "man-pleasing", of idol worship — one of the greatest sins of all.

And so our sins progress through the following stages. Why even examine how sin develops? In order to learn how to diagnose it in time. Any illness progresses through several stages, and it's easier to treat in the early stages than the final stages.

The first stage of sin is called "assault": this arises when a thought occurs to a person. The fact is, every sin originates outside a person. This is very important to remember. Why do we have the ability to repent? Because man does not invent sin. Sin is the invention of the devil. For the devil, the opponent of God and the enemy of the human race, was the first to sin. Hence, a person who sins enters into a licensing agreement with the devil. He is using

what the devil has taught him. And so the devil insinuates a thought into a person. I think this has happened to all of us: a repulsive thought occurs to you, or maybe not so repulsive, maybe attractive, maybe quite pleasant, as is often the way. What example can we use? Let's take the fast. You know that during the fast Orthodox Christians don't eat meat or dairy products. You go to someone's house, walk into the kitchen, and there you see some cold cuts of meat, the kind everyone loves. And the thought occurs to you: "What delicious-looking meat! How I'd just love to go and eat it!" Is the thought a sin or not?

A: It's not a sin that the thought occurred to you.

FD: Correct: if we have not yet accepted the thought, it has simply entered our minds. It is a door to the one who is pushing it on us: the devil.

And so we are faced with two possible ways of reacting. The first is to say: "Get out, you disgusting thought," and be done with it. About this the Bible says, remember: *Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones* (Ps. 136:9). These little ones are evil at its earliest stages of development. We need to take that evil and dash it against the stones, and be done with it. Against what stone? Against the stone of the name of Christ the Savior. And the evil will depart, and we will receive a reward in Heaven.

But what do inexperienced people usually do? They start looking over the thought. The person gets distracted: Hmm … cold cuts of meat certainly are tasty; my thoughts are right about that.

What a delicate savor it has. And the smell! I sniff it, and … This is called "interaction" — the second stage of sin. You see, the sin has started its natural development. At this stage the sin is already censurable, but this depends on a person's level of spiritual growth. For a person at a high level of asceticism this is a serious sin.

Then the thought begins to take hold. The next thought comes: will God really notice if I eat this piece of meat? Why does He care? Will it really make any difference to Him if I eat a piece? This third stage is called "consent", and consists of interacting and conversing with the thought. The conscience says: "My dear fellow, remember we are on the cusp of Christ's Nativity: there's only a week left to wait. Are you really not going to wait for the sake of obedience to the Church and to properly meet the Nativity?" And a struggle ensues. It is worth noting that God does everything to give the conscience an even chance against the evil thought, fifty-fifty. Which way will the person turn — this way or that? If he turns in the right direction and overcomes the sin as best he can, he will receive a reward in the Heavenly Kingdom.

But if he does not overcome it, the next, fourth stage begins: thought becomes action. The person goes and eats the cold meat. Then he says: "Well, I've already eaten some; I might as well have some more." He eats all the cold meat his hosts have, and stuffs something more into his pockets, unnoticed. This is called "captivity", or action, and is naturally to be condemned, and the person will most certainly

be called to account for this at the Last Judgement. Of course, you understand that the chief thing here is not the cold meat as such, because of course there's nothing bad about cold meat. The sin lies specifically in the person's abuse of it.

Then the final stage begins. The person has committed the sin, and now it starts to become a habit. The second time he encounters the same situation it will be easier: breaking the fast the second time will be easier, and the third time still easier. Then comes what the Bible calls "passion", or, in secular terms, a rut — a conditioned response. For instance, when you walk into your house, you automatically turn on the light. The same thing happens to this person of ours: he begins to sin automatically. He does so out of habit. Take smoking, for instance. The smoker lights his cigarette automatically, staring blankly, without even thinking about it.

A: So is smoking a sin?

FD: Of course — it's suicide, in a very literal sense. In the same way, alcoholics pour themselves one shot after another after another — again, automatically. This state is called "drunkenness".

The word *passion* comes from the Latin word for suffering. And the passions certainly do lead to suffering: a person in the grip of passions, or even one passion that has possessed him, dooms himself to torment. He is in a state of suffering. A simple example would be a person who smokes: if he goes a week without smoking, how will he like that? He'll go into withdrawal. And what if he dies in that state? What will happen then? He will be in eternal withdrawal.

Or a drug addict, or an alcoholic. Why? Because he remains addicted. In this lies the root of the eternal torments that take possession of a person. God says: Burn in the flame and the fire that you lit yourselves. You kindled it, so you endure it. *Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of Mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow* (Is. 50:11).

A: What about gluttony? How much should you eat? Are there any standards?

FD: The standard is this: eat so that after eating you want to pray, so that the desire to pray remains.

A: A person should eat just enough that he wants to pray?

FD: Yes. If after eating you want to pray, everything is all right. There is no universal standard. Everyone's body is different: one person eats two or three kilograms of food a day, while another eats half a kilo. In the same way, one person can drink a glass of vodka and feel fine, while for another a single shot may be too much.

A: And if you've eaten and want to eat more, should you stop yourself?

FD: If there are people for whom an ordinary helping of food is not enough, let them eat more, rather than go around thinking of nothing but food. This is not the standard. Again, the spiritual standard is for a person to eat just enough that he still wants to pray. For a person must always walk before the face of God and serve Him.

God's direct intervention is necessary in order to overcome the passions. Without God's intervention man will never overcome his passions, since the passions become second nature to him. Of course, sometimes the passions broker mutually beneficial exchanges: one passion leaves to be replaced with a more powerful passion. This is sometimes very simple. For instance, a person quits smoking to have a better opinion of himself. It's out of the frying pan and into the fire: the person exchanges the lesser passion of smoking for the greater passion of pride. A person may have no passions at all except for pride, but pride alone is enough to drag a person down to the depths of hell. If a person does something consciously and doesn't repent afterward, naturally he will have to answer for everything.

A: How can a person have to answer for everything? How is that determined?

FD: It's determined depending on the person. For a person who knows nothing about fasting, for him breaking the fast isn't even a sin. But for a person who knows about the fast and consciously breaks it, for him the responsibility is naturally greater. Because the sin is not in the cold cuts, but in consuming them at an inappropriate time.

A: What if somebody does hard, physical labor, and really needs to eat?

FD: I'll give you a specific example from history: Ilya Muromets. This is someone who really lived: he died in the late eleventh century, and his relics lie in the Kiev Caves Lavra. He wasn't very tall — just

two meters twenty centimeters.[14] And he was only a meter and a half across. You can go there yourselves and see his relics. Do you know what he ate? We know the answer from the historically verified legend about Ilya Muromets' encounter with a monster. The monster was most likely a giant from Judean Khazaria. And the monster asks: "Do you eat so much, Ilya Muromets, that you wish to do battle with me?" He replies: "Each day I eat a loaf and drink a flagon of water, and I am sated." A rather fragile fellow, wouldn't you say? The monster answers: "You are certainly no match for me: I am only sated when I have eaten half a bull and five hundred loaves." So what happens? Ilya Muromets promptly defeats him. Why? Because the number of calories a person takes in depends not on the quantity of food he eats, but on the food's nutrient availability. Some people can eat and eat and eat, yet they're always hungry.

A: Is nutrient availability the same for those who eat meat and for those who don't?

FD: It varies. That's why even doctors say that some people benefit from eating meat, and others from eating vegetables.

A: So how did Ilya Muromets get the calories he needed? And why wasn't he physically weakened?

FD: That's how he ate: a loaf of bread and water. And he was victorious, because he served God. God gave him the strength. After all, the fasts are not intended to help a person with their dieting. What is fasting? Besides abstaining from meat, milk, eggs,

[14] Over seven feet tall. — *Trans.*

and fish, what else does fasting imply? Going to church more often, reading the Word of God more often, doing more good works. Then God's power comes to a person directly. These are not empty words or daydreams. God's power is a reality, one you can reach out and touch. For instance, Anthony the Great ate only twice a week for forty years. He was never sick, was very physically powerful, and could walk five hundred kilometers on foot — something I doubt any of us could do. He lived in a remote desert, where he had to walk a kilometer and a half one way to reach the spring, carrying the water back on his own shoulders, and he lived to be a hundred and thirty.

This was all because God's power really does work, you understand. This isn't just a fantasy or a fairy tale. But a person who says he hasn't the strength usually simply doesn't trust God. Remember, any sin is connected with disobedience to God. In the Church, the sin of breaking the fast in this case is due to a lack of faith. How are the passions healed? They are healed, naturally, by sincere remorse and the power of God, which is bestowed in the sacraments: the sacraments of repentance and of baptism. If a person has not been baptized, he receives baptism and obtains power from God to overcome the passions. A baptized person struggles against the passions through repentance and communion, and likewise receives power from God.

But it is not enough for us simply not to do evil. You know, people often say: "In your church it's all 'don'ts' — don't this, don't that. What's left that

a person *can* do?" There is a book called *The Works of Peter Damascene*. In it he lists two hundred and seventy virtues one can perform instead of the passions. Does that sound like enough? And those are just the novice virtues. In other words, a person assimilates the properties of God Himself. And this work goes on without end — endless likening to the Creator. But what do you think a virtue is? How does a virtue differ from a good work?

A: I suppose a virtue is permanent, while a good work is done once, and then it's gone.

FD: Correct. Virtue is goodness that has become a habit. In other words, our goal is not merely to do good, but for doing good to become a habit. For example, if a person repents of a sin, what does he need to do? He needs to make a habit of the virtue that is the opposite of that sin. It is this that will be a true correction of the sin. And when a person entrenches a virtue in himself, he naturally does so with Christ's help. The Lord says: *Without Me ye can do nothing* (Jn. 15:5). And this is the absolute truth! Because a person may do a single good work in the heat of the moment, or for some other reason, but it is impossible to make this a constant without Christ. Or perhaps it is possible, but only out of pride, and this is worse than doing no good works at all. Because a "good" work done out of pride is repulsive to God and men. Do you like people who are proud of how righteous they are?

A: No.

FD: Of course you don't. People often say: "But pride is a positive trait!" No, that's not true. Suppose

you're talking to a person who has a very high regard for and high opinion of himself. Do you enjoy talking with him? And the more pronounced this trait is in him, the less you want to be around him. For pride is a sin — the original sin, and the root of all other sins. It was pride that destroyed Satan. And indeed, the fact that man is proud of himself, that he has a sense of self-esteem, is the fruit of illogical thinking. I'll tell you this: if you want to be proud, go right ahead, but be proud of the things you've done without your soul. For your soul was given you by God. Be proud of what you've done without your hands, because your hands were also given you by God. Without your legs, without your head, without your torso. Everything was given you by God. Of what you've done without your mind, because your mind was also given you by God. Of this you may be proud. Everything that's left is all yours. But what is left? Nothing is left. It's all very simple: you can be proud of what you did before you were born. For your birth was also given you by God. What is this sense of self-esteem? Where does this self-esteem come from?

A: But a person has to have a certain degree of self-respect.

FD: Why? Why respect yourself? Tell me; I'm genuinely interested.

A: Well, a person really does need to have a sense of self-respect.

FD: Why? Explain it to me.

A: If a person respects himself, he'll respect others.

FD: Not necessarily, by any means. On the contrary, the more respect a person has for himself, the less respect he has for others. This has long been noted. I have not known a single case to the contrary. Can you think of any such examples?

A: No, but a person needs to have self-respect. Just not too much.

FD: So how much is "too much"? What is this trait a person can't live without, where the more he has of it the worse he becomes?

A: But why do you say that? It just needs to be within reason.

FD: So what defines "within reason"? For instance, I once knew an alcoholic who would always say: "I drink within reason; I know my limit. When I fall over, I stop drinking." Everyone has his own standard of what is "within reason". And this is the problem: a Christian, a true Christian, does not pursue self-esteem, or being respected by others. He does not attempt to prove anything to anyone, you see, and hence he is completely free. A person who pursues self-esteem, however, is always trying to prove to himself and to others that he still has his dignity, that he knows his rights. A person like that is not free in the least.

A: You know, as they say, that kind of thinking will get you nowhere.

FD: If the opposite will get you somewhere, better to get nowhere.

A: Well, a person still has to live somehow.

FD: So who's stopping him from living?

A: If you don't have any self-respect in society, others won't respect you, either.

FD: If you become a true Christian, how much others respect you won't matter to you in the least. It's impossible to offend a Christian. A humble person who pays no attention to what others think about him, whether bad or good, is completely free. How can you offend someone like that? Is it even possible?

A: Without that you won't love yourself, and therefore you won't love your neighbor as yourself.

FD: We already love ourselves; that's not the question here. I don't know anyone who doesn't love himself. The question is not one of loving others and not loving oneself too much; the question is how we can love our neighbor as ourselves if we love ourselves incorrectly. If we love ourselves, that doesn't mean that we say: "Oh, what a good person I am, what a kind person I am, what a great person I am." We don't say that. We do both good and evil. But if we're normal people, if we're honest with ourselves, we don't justify the evil we do. The same is true for our neighbor: we separate the person from the sin, loving the sinner, but hating the sin. This is what we mean. And this is what the commandment is about. But when a person goes around strutting his stuff, that doesn't mean he loves himself. Look at your former life: take a good look at yourself in the past, and think how many hard knocks you would have avoided if you hadn't gone around pushing for your rights and your dignity.

A: But what if someone on the street offends you badly, offends your dignity?

FD: If you don't have the feeling, it won't be offended. We have to realize for ourselves that there is such a thing as subjectivity, and that it is our enemy. Unfortunately, since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin people have been living in a fantasy world: they indulge in wild fantasies about their surroundings. Instead of seeing the people around them, let alone their own selves, they see the fantasy they've invented. You don't see yourself, and you don't see inside the people you encounter. You only imagine the people living alongside you. You can verify this for yourselves. Suppose a person has a strong sense of self-respect, or else not so strong. How will people treat him? Is it respectable for a person to respect himself?

A: Yes, if he says as much.

FD: And if he doesn't declare it, how can you know whether he has a sense of self-respect?

A: By whether he treats the people around him well, appropriately.

FD: That may be, but once again he is treating those around him well for a completely different reason.

A: What reason is that?

FD: Do you know why Christians treat those around them well? Because Christians see the image of God in those around them. Why do we bow to people when we meet them? Because we revere the image of God in them. Today, unfortunately, people often confuse Christian and secular morality.

Secular morality is this: I don't bother you, you don't bother me. By and large, it's a dog-eat-dog world. So as long as you don't bother me, we're very polite to one another. I've been at secular luncheons where I heard people extolling one another's virtues, and it was revolting to hear, because these same people who were singing a person's praises to his face would be whispering nasty things about him behind his back. It was all based on common hypocrisy. Christianity is based on something completely different. Christianity sharply differentiates between the sin and the sinner, and it never justifies sin under any circumstances, unless a person has repented of it.

A: And if the sin is done for a higher good?

FD: Good done by evil means is evil.

A: But what if it's a small evil that results in a tremendous good?

FD: It's still evil. All evildoers have thought just that way, from Hitler to Stalin. We need to always remember: good done by evil means is essentially evil. So naturally the whole thing is self-deception.

The Christian has a fair bit of the pessimist in him, and until the Last Judgment we have no expectations that people will turn into angels. And so, naturally, we measure things by an unusual standard: we compare everything to God. Who do we see as a normal person? Is any Christian a normal person?

A: Jesus Christ.

FD: Jesus Christ, quite right. And it is this standard, and it alone, against which we measure.

A: And the apostles?

FD: The apostles also, as having imitated Him. The same for the Mother of God, and for the saints who have been united with Christ.

A: What about a priest of the Church?

FD: To the degree to which he is the image of Christ. Many have been. This is exactly what we are talking about: we are oriented towards Christ. Let me give you a practical example of how to tell a good work from an evil one. What would Christ do in your place? Do you think Christ would go around flaunting His self-respect?

A: No.

FD: Do you think He was an unhappy person? Could He have been wrong?

A: If He gave His life for all, that would seem to suggest that He was an unhappy person.

FD: He conquered — conquered death: He is the Conqueror! Do you see? And this is the answer: the whole essence of Christianity comes down to Christ, to Christ's Person. This is precisely why the Gospel gives these paradoxical commandments, such as: turn the other cheek to one who offends you. Certainly a scandalous commandment; it always has been. I think the Roman legionnaire didn't turn the other cheek to his neighbor any more often than you or I. And the commandment stands completely independent of time. The Lord is not governed by time. Morality is in no way dependent on time. It is governed by the will of God. We must always be governed by it alone. God's will is expounded in God's Word, according to which we must act. In every instance when there

is a conflict between a person's desires and God's Word, that person must follow God's will, God's Word. Incidentally, experience shows that a person who does so will never go wrong. Many people think: If I behave that way people won't understand me; they'll get the wrong idea about me. But God has always seen through and helped up those who have truly acted according to His will. Whereas those who have acted according to their own will have invariably fallen. And a commandment is a brief expression of God's will.

And so the first commandment is this: *I am the Lord thy God … Thou shalt have no other gods before Me* (Ex. 20:2–3). We must not worship any gods except the Lord. We must worship God, serving Him alone. Incidentally, this is why Christians don't serve the motherland. They respect the motherland and help it, but they do not serve it.

A: Christians don't serve the motherland?!

FD: No, though they do join the army and take the oath.

A: But that's what serving the motherland means.

FD: I'll explain the difference to you. Serving the motherland means setting the motherland above all else. A Christian would never set the motherland above all else. When a conflict arises between the will of the motherland and the will of God, a Christian will follow God's will. Here's a simple example: suppose some soldiers are shooting innocent civilians. What must a Christian soldier do? He must refuse. Even though he might be court-martialed for it, it is his right and his duty.

A: But what about shooting enemies of the Church?

FD: On the battlefield a Christian soldier may kill and fight, because he is doing so in defense of his people. But only if the war is a just war. I'm not talking about unjust wars.

From the Church's standpoint, communism is of course quite literally a heresy — a false teaching about God, the world, and man. About God, because it denied Him. About the world, because there were attempts to build the Kingdom of God here on earth, without God — to build paradise on earth without God.

A: So what government can be justified?

FD: The Church. It is a kingdom that is not of this world. For instance, it considers democracy better than communism, and monarchy better than democracy. There are various degrees, but of course monarchy is also not an ideal form of government.

A: What form of government would be ideal?

FD: The ideal form of government is the Kingdom of Heaven.

A: That's still monarchy, though.

FD: Yes, but it is God's monarchy, not man's. The Church supports any government to the degree that it carries out God's explicit command: to restrain evil. In other words, the Church supported the government in imposing prison sentences as punishment for murder. The Church supported the government in defending its citizens, for example, during

the Great Patriotic War. But the Church never supports evil of any kind.

A: What is the Church's position on the death penalty?

FD: The death penalty was actually God's will. After the Great Flood God said that whoever shed the blood of a man, his blood would be shed by the hand of man, because man was created in the image of God. In other words, a person who kills is committing an iconoclastic act, and his blood must be shed.

A: So the Church supports the death penalty?

FD: Once again, we were not the ones who instituted it, so it's not for us to support or oppose it. There is a biblical standard according to which premeditated murder is punishable only by the death penalty. But that is only for premeditated murder.

A: So does that mean that the person who carries out the death sentence, such as the executioner, is committing a sin?

FD: No. The fact is, the person who does so is carrying out God's express command. He is executing God's justice. He is God's representative — I mean the judge who issues the death sentence. In the Bible he is even called a god, with a small "g". But once again, this is if he issues the sentence justly. A judge who judges unjustly or in opposition to God's Law is a criminal of the worst kind, and God promises to punish him terribly. And we have seen examples of this. This, incidentally, is why God is not indifferent to the life of society. If a delegate passes a law that contradicts God's will — such as

Chernomyrdin, who extended the legal term limits for abortion (from twelve to twenty weeks) — he is naturally a terrible criminal in God's eyes.

A: Aren't there situations when an abortion can be justified in some way?

FD: When can killing an innocent, defenseless person be justified?

A: Well, I can't think of an example right now.

FD: The Church permits tolerating abortion only in cases of extrauterine pregnancy, specifically because neither the baby nor the mother has any chance of surviving.

A: What if the fetus has serious defects?

FD: Interesting logic, indeed; it never ceases to amaze me. So if a person has a serious defect, he ought to be killed. Very well, then, let's kill adults with serious defects, too. If a person is left an invalid after a car accident, with no chance of recovery, let's just kill him. Very logical.

A: What about cloning? What is the Church's view of cloning?

FD: The Church takes a very negative view of cloning, certainly.

Now let's talk about the commandments. The first commandment is violated by those who do not worship God, who venerate gods other than the Lord, meaning false gods — Perun, Buddha, or someone else; those who are atheists or heretics, meaning those who distort God's Word; and those who splinter the Church, the Body of Christ, for the sake of their own ambitions. Do you realize what is happening here? Man is launching a rebellion against

God Himself. And people like this usually come to no good end. This commandment is also violated by people who worship their own selves instead of God. Who are these people? The proud. Pride is a sin against the first commandment.

A: A person can both pray to God and respect himself.

FD: No man can serve two masters. The Lord said this specifically, and experience has shown as much. Either you will take care of one and neglect the other, or you will forget about one and serve the other. Violators of this commandment include vainglorious people, boasters, who live for false glory. Is it a good thing to seek glory? Yes, it is. But what kind of glory is this that puffs itself up to bursting? This is upsetting, unpleasant, frustrating. What should glory be like? It should never end. This is eternal glory. And who can bestow eternal glory? Only the Eternal God. This is why God said: … *them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed* (1 Sam. 2:30). This, for instance, is why the saints are people who sought out true glory, becoming truly glorious. But people who seek glory on this earth are foolish, because their glory is futile, and these people are naturally committing a sin. This commandment is violated by man-pleasers. These are those who act against God's will, against their conscience, in order to please other people. For this reason Christians have the following rule: if anyone tries to make us go against God's will, we must obey God, not man. It makes no difference whether it is our government, our family, our

parents, our children, or our husband. You see, for us God's will is always our top priority. Everything else is secondary.

A: What about honoring one's parents?

FD: Honoring one's parents extends as far as the parent does not demand that we go against God's will. God's will is always the top priority, because God is above all men. Our parents cannot save us from death, and cannot grant us resurrection. Nor did they give us life, but rather God through them. That is precisely why we honor our parents: as the instruments through which God gave us life.

The next commandment states: *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments* (Ex. 20:4–6). This commandment prohibits worshipping idols, which is why one must not wear any sort of amulets, or have any statuettes of various pagan gods in the home, let alone offer sacrifices to them. One must not have idols in the home. Experience has shown that those who have idols experience terror, begin to be fearful, and start feeling horrible in their own apartment.

A: What about the cult followings of some performers?

FD: One must not make idols of people. The commandment prohibits this. A person who makes an idol out of a singer or a soccer team, a rock music fan or a soccer fan, is most certainly violating this commandment: he is worshipping a creation rather than the Creator, and usually not exactly the best of creations.

A: Even if someone just likes a performer?

FD: No. If a person makes a performer his ideal, of course that's a sin. If a person simply likes someone, that's not a problem. You see, sin occurs when a person becomes a fanatic, when a person makes another person his ideal, idolizing him. This commandment likewise prohibits the terrible sins of magic of any kind: sorcery, employing magicians, healers, psychics, soothsayers … God says that cursed in His eyes are those who do this, because these people commune directly with the demons. I warn you of this because many people turn to psychic healers, thinking that just because these healers set out icons they must be from God. The Church categorically prohibits employing psychic healers. The church canons prescribe barring a person who employs the services of a healer from communion for six years. The healer himself is barred from communion for twenty-five years. His sin is considered more serious than the sin of murder. The Church likewise prohibits astrology, because the astrologer does not believe in freedom: he actually believes that the stars rule the world, and instead of God he worships the celestial luminaries. On New Year's Day in Christian homes there should be no zodiac symbols, such as rams or goats. When

I come to bless an apartment, the first thing I do is take down all such pictures from the walls.

A: So one mustn't wear a zodiac symbol?

FD: Naturally. It's either the zodiac symbol or the cross. You have to choose: either a person worships a celestial body, or he worships God, the Maker of those bodies. In the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, God says: *Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it* (Is. 47:13–14).

A: What about the magicians that followed the star?

FD: That's exactly why they went back another way (Mt. 2:12). As it is said, those who worshipped the stars "were taught by a star to worship Thee, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know Thee, the dayspring from on high." The star led them to Christ, so that they would cease to worship the stars. In other words, the intent was to depart from astrology, to lead them away from astrology, and this is why God used a star to lead them away from worshipping the stars.

People often ask about the meaning of children being punished for the sins of their fathers. This refers to generational sin, which does in fact happen: a generation of drunkards or a generation of fornicators. This happens when the parents are terribly

wanton, the children are terribly wanton, and so on. And when the parents fall into mortal sins, God punishes through the third and fourth generations, then ends that generation altogether — simply cuts it off. This is what Scripture is referring to. Why? Because God is a jealous God.

A: So what does a person do if he suspects that all his problems are caused by some generational sins that have nothing to do with him — the sins of his grandmother, grandfather, and so on?

FD: It's all very simple: "Lord, I flee unto thee. Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God." When a person comes under God's protection, when he is baptized, all curses cease to affect him. God is the Lord, the Ruler of All. And God is an absolute ruler. No-one can oppose His hand — no-one. Neither man, nor angel, nor evil spirit.

A: But an evil spirit opposes God.

FD: When God decides to do something, no-one has the power to hinder Him.

A: So why doesn't God just go and destroy the devil, for example? Then there would be no sins.

FD: If the devil forced people to commit sins, that would naturally be a logical question. But the devil forces no-one. He makes the suggestion, and people comply.

The next commandment states: *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain* (Ex. 20:7). So one must not take the Lord's name in vain. What does it mean "to take the Lord's name in vain"? When people punctuate their speech with the

words: "Oh my God!" They are pronouncing God's name to no purpose. This is completely impermissible. For God's name is sacred, and it sanctifies a person. For instance, if you start using an icon as a dustpan, that would be sacrilege. The same is true of God's name: if you toss it around, that also is sacrilege. This commandment naturally also forbids committing sacrilege, mocking or blaspheming God. It requires that God's name be treated with reverence. Indeed, experience shows that those who blaspheme God's name are swift to suffer punishment from God.

A: Sometimes a person loses someone close to him, someone dies, and the person says: "I've stopped believing in God. How could God do this? How could He take the person I loved?" How can we help people who become disillusioned with God when they've been through one misfortune after another?

FD: I beg your pardon, but did they ever turn to God before this? Has this occurred to them? Why should He help them? That's firstly. Secondly, they need to remember that what matters most to God is the state of a person's soul. This is why He takes a person either when their soul is most ready for eternity, or when they are on the brink of committing an evil act that simply must be dreadfully punished. God decides whether to take a person out of these considerations, and not based on whether to let someone live a little longer to raise his children. For God does all things for a person's own good, or else to prevent a greater evil.

A: What if a car accident or something unexpected is sent to a person, something beyond his control?

FD: Once again, it was beyond the person's control, but within God's control. There is such a thing as Divine Providence, which we simply need to accept.

A: People often say that God takes the best of us.

FD: I don't know; it can happen either way. Either the best or the worst. It's interesting to note that people often say: "How could this happen? I haven't done anything particularly bad, and here I've fallen into such misfortune!" The fact is, people who say this, that they "haven't done anything particularly bad", are so enamored of themselves that they think they're doing just fine, and there just isn't any room left for God in their lives. And God is obliged to burst that person's sense of self-sufficiency so that the person might come to Him. This is the goal. The person is simply living inside his shell, like a snail, and cannot see God. And God shakes the person out of his shell. Blessed Augustine put it well: "How merciful Thou art, O God, Who dashes all the plans I make that I might see the Heavens."

The next commandment states: *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all*

that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it (Ex. 20:8–11). This commandment makes it obligatory to keep the seventh day holy. Whereas in the Old Testament they had the Sabbath, today, now that the Lord has risen from the dead and given us the victory over death by His Resurrection from the dead, we keep Sunday holy as the seventh day. We observe Saturday, as well — for instance, on Saturday and Sunday we do not fast from food entirely. The Church prohibits fasting from food entirely on Saturday and Sunday — except, of course, for times when there is nothing to eat. For us, deliberately fasting from all food is prohibited on these days. A person who fasts on Saturday and Sunday is barred from Communion.

On Saturdays and Sundays of, say, the Nativity Fast, we always eat fish. During Great Lent on Saturdays and Sundays we eat squid, crabs, shrimp, and vegetable oil. In other words, we always relax the fast, because we set Saturday and Sunday apart as feast days. On Saturday and Sunday we reduce the number of prostrations we make; on Sundays prostrations are prohibited altogether. On Saturday and Sunday Liturgy is always served. There are days when the Liturgy is not served, but it is always served on Saturday and Sunday. But the Lord's commandment is primarily that on these days we must do no work of our own.

A: What should we do, then?

FD: On Sunday we must not do housework, or, say, till the garden. We dedicate Sunday to God.

Sunday begins at six o'clock in the evening on Saturday and lasts until Sunday evening. All people, all Christians, must be in church on Saturday evening and Sunday morning. Exceptions may be made for people who are gravely ill or who live someplace where the church is far away, a hundred kilometers or so. But even those who live far away from a church must read the Word of God on that day. So when do we work in our gardens? The answer is simple: we till and work in the garden until Saturday evening, and may even till it a little on Sunday evening. Then God will bless our work. But if a person works in the garden on Sunday, God will send locusts, frost, and the like. It is common knowledge that when people decide to work on Sunday, what happens is that either they get sick or God punishes them through their garden.

A: What if they can't work any other day?

FD: You just see that you find the time, so that you can dedicate Sunday to God. It's another matter if you're an emergency medical worker, for instance, or if you work at a continuously-operating blast furnace, or you're on the police force and your shift falls on a Sunday. Then, of course, you go to work, when you can't switch days, but in that case you go to God's temple on a different day. In all other cases we must naturally be in God's temple, rather than doing our own work, and read the Word of God. You may work, and work hard at that, for the sick, the unfortunate, the person unable to do things for himself, because Sunday is for doing good, as the Lord says.

This commandment likewise requires that we keep the church fasts and feasts. On great feasts, like Nativity, Theophany, and Pascha, we come to God's temple to pray without fail, and refrain from working just as on Sunday. As you know, there are twelve great feasts: Transfiguration, the Nativity of the Theotokos, the Exaltation of the Cross, the Entry into the Temple of the Most-holy Theotokos, Nativity, Theophany, the Meeting of the Lord, Annunciation, the Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem, Ascension, Pentecost, and Dormition. These are the twelve feasts. The Church likewise blesses us to fast during the fasts leading up to feasts, as the commandment requires — that is, not to eat meat and dairy products. These are the four fasts: the Nativity Fast; Great Lent, which lasts for the seven weeks preceding Pascha; the Saints Peter and Paul Fast, which begins a week after Pentecost and lasts until July 12; and the Dormition Fast, which lasts from August 14–28. We likewise fast each Wednesday and Friday, except for fast-free weeks. On Wednesday we remember Judas' betrayal, and on Friday we remember the Lord's crucifixion.

The next commandment we have is the commandment to honor our parents: *Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee* (Ex. 20:12). We must honor our parents, not hurt them, not strike them under any circumstances — this is a mortal sin, and the Lord may punish us terribly for this. He inflicts severe punishment on those who strike their parents. I had a friend who fought in Chechnya,

and he told me that the people who die most often, sometimes burned alive, are the soldiers who were known to have beaten their parents. God Himself punishes such sinners, because this is a mortal sin. For God gave you life through your parents, and by scorning your parents you scorn the instrument of God, and God's providence for you. So you see how everything is interrelated.

A: Is it true that people who die by fire ascend directly to Heaven?

FD: No, it's not. It is those who love God who ascend to Heaven. Not mechanically, not because they've received some blessing from Him, but because they love God, and for that reason alone.

In addition, this commandment also requires that we not defame the government. Though we may disobey the government if it demands that we violate God's will, we do not defame the government. Inasmuch as it fulfills God's will, it is pleasing to God. This is why Christians may be, say, policemen or judges. And naturally we honor priests as God's servants.

And so, the next commandment states: *Thou shalt not kill* (Ex. 20:13). So we must not kill. This is the sixth commandment — not the first, as people often think, but the sixth. Naturally we must not kill people, and from what point on?

A: From birth.

FD: From conception. A person becomes a person at the moment of conception: a person with an immortal soul, a free will. This is why a person may not kill any other person. And for this same reason

abortion is, quite naturally, a mortal sin. The church canons bar a person from Communion for seven years for having an abortion. One must not use hormonal contraceptives or intra-uterine devices (IUDs); this is the same as abortion.

A: What about contraception in general?

FD: In general contraception comes from a lack of faith in God. There is one permissible means of contraception — the natural method. But once again, this is out of condescension; it is not blessed, but is permitted, because no abortion takes place, and no unnatural devices are used. We'll talk about that more later. God gives us as many children as necessary. In our time people react hysterically: "Oh, no! How am I going to feed them all?!" If God gives a person breath, He will certainly give us enough to feed him. People had enough to eat for centuries and millennia, and all of a sudden for some reason we're not going to have enough to eat.

A: These are harder times in which to raise a child. There are many poor people on the streets, who are simply unable to keep themselves fed. On the road from Tyoply Stan to Yasnev you'll see mothers imploring you for help, standing there with a child, holding signs — large families that are unable to feed their children.

FD: I won't say this is true of everyone, but more often than not these are con artists. I can say this for certain, because people like this have come to us more than once. "Come with me," I say, "and I'll buy you grain and flower; let me buy everything you need. I won't give you money, but I'll buy it for you."

"No, thanks," they say, and away they run. So apparently it wasn't food they needed.

A: In general, who may ask for alms?

FD: If a person is in need, naturally he may ask for alms. And I do meet some perfectly good people asking for alms. Naturally, I give them something. Here's what I usually do, and I recommend you do the same: if a person asks you for money to buy bread, go and buy him bread. That way you give alms, and you'll know that he won't use them to buy drink. Even if he's an alcoholic, at least he'll have something decent to eat with his booze.

This commandment (not to kill) prohibits not only killing, but also getting angry without cause. Remember, the Lord says: … *whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment* (Mt. 5:22). It prohibits berating, making a scene, and getting irritated; it prohibits fighting and hatred. So how are you to determine whether or not you are angry without a cause? Where do you draw the line? Anger without a cause is when we are angry at something that does not separate us from God. If we are angry at something that separates us from God, such anger is a righteous reaction.

A: How do you prevent yourself from becoming angry or irritated?

FD: You need to pray. This passion is overcome only by prayer and reading the Word of God, and is healed by reading the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Always make the sign of the cross when you feel anger welling up. Sign the cross over your heart,

so that the Lord will drive away irritation, and you will see that the Lord will drive it out.

A: So is anger at naughty children righteous?

FD: Yes. But first pray to the Mother of God and to Christ the Savior, take a drink of holy water, then calm yourself and punish your children.

A: So one may punish one's children?

FD: One must. The Scriptures say: *He that spareth his rod hateth his son* (Prov. 13:25). When should you punish a child? When one child hits another, he simply needs a sound spanking. But any punishment should be without anger, don't forget. It should restore justice. Frequently, and regrettably, people do the exact opposite: we punish maliciously. And what happens? Justice is not restored, and instead of the child recognizing that he has been justly punished he thinks his parents have taken their anger out on him. And he's absolutely right. Instead of bridling one evil you compound it by another. Does that make sense? What makes sense is for a person to first calm himself, then spank the guilty child. The punishment should be inevitable. And it must be just, bear in mind.

The next commandment states: *Thou shalt not commit adultury* (Ex. 20:14). This is probably the least popular commandment of our time. But God prohibits cheating on one's wife or one's husband. This is adultery. The prescribed penalty for adultery is being barred from Communion for fifteen years. For this is a double sin: it is both fornication and oath-breaking.

A: What if the people have only had a civil ceremony, not a church marriage?

FD: It's still adultery. If you've had a civil ceremony, you have promised to be faithful to each other, and you are breaking your word. The Lord doesn't just forbid us to commit adultery. He says: … *whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart* (Mt. 5:28). For this reason one must refrain from fornicating even in thought. Naturally one should not read stories about sexual immorality, or watch filthy movies; I imagine that goes without saying. What is fornication? Fornication is sexual relations outside marriage. If two people free from the bonds of marriage have sexual relations with each other, this is called the mortal sin of fornication. Naturally, it is more lightly punished than adultery — only seven years of being barred from Communion. But I'm sure you will agree that seven years is no short time, either. And if a person does not repent of the sin of fornication, he will die, and it is said that fire and brimstone shall be his portion. *But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death* (Rev. 21:8).

A person who fornicates becomes one body with all the fornicators in the world. This is real. A person who has sexual relations actually does become a single entity with the person with whom he is fornicating; this is the simple truth. If he has sexual relations

within marriage, he becomes a single entity with his wife, and God blesses him, because his marriage is sanctified by God in the marriage service. If a person does this outside marriage, God does not bless him. So who does bless him? The enemy. This is why a person who lives with an adulterer is involuntarily united to Satan. According to the church canons, if a priest's wife is unfaithful to him he must divorce her; otherwise he is defrocked. Of course, laymen are not obligated to divorce: they may live with the husband or wife who was unfaithful to them, but on the condition that the unfaithful spouse has repented before God, asked forgiveness, and pledged never to do so again. Otherwise you should not live with a person like this, because you will become perverted and you will pervert your children. Naturally, if the person asks forgiveness we may forgive him. We are not obligated to, but we may.[15]

This commandment likewise prohibits homosexuality of both forms, which are terrible sins against nature. I don't even want to name them, but unfortunately these unnatural sexual relations exist even in marriage: anal and oral sex. These are called the sins of Sodom, and for these God burned those accursed cities. In other words, these are sins that cry out to Heaven to be avenged. If a nation permits such sins to become the norm, the Lord sometimes wipes a nation like this off the face of the

[15] The author is referring to forgiveness not in the sense of forgiving the sin, which is obligatory, but in the sense of accepting the repentant adulterous spouse back again, which is not. — *Trans.*

earth. An example of this is Sodom and Gomorrah, and the recent tsunami on the shores of Thailand. Likewise prohibited are things such as masturbation and onanism. Onanism is named after Onan, an Old Testament personage, who instead of completing the sex act released his sperm onto the ground, to avoid having children. And the Bible says: … *the thing which he did displeased the Lord: wherefore He slew him also* (Gen. 38:10). Why? Because God is the Creator of life. And whoever prevents life from occurring serves the devil. Frequently when a man commits this sin it ends in the woman developing psychosis. Here particular hormonal causes are at work, which disturb the psyche. Very frequently this leads to a person developing a compulsive desire to cheat on his spouse. All this affects the psyche on the physiological level.

The next commandment states: *Thou shalt not steal* (Ex. 20:15). One must not steal, because by doing so, albeit perhaps unconsciously, a person is actually saying: "God, You're not running the world right. You gave something to that fellow, and not to me. I'm going to correct what You did wrong." What we have here is revolt — outright classic revolt. To whom does all the world's gold and silver belong? To Him Who created it, naturally. This is why God has the right to bestow upon and to take away from anyone He wishes. Why is a rich man given his riches? To test his compassion. If he fails in this, he will be held accountable.

A: His riches will be taken away?

FD: No, that's not the point. No, God gives riches in order to test a person. If they don't help others, if they are thieves, they will be held accountable. As one wise Greek priest says, there are two sure-fire ways of getting a bullet in the head or getting poor quickly: stealing, and working on feast days.

A: So is it a bad thing to aspire to become rich?

FD: Of course it is. A person who loves silver will never be satisfied with silver (Eccl. 5:10). And this is really true, isn't it? There's even a saying: "There's no such thing as enough money."

A: What if you aspire to become rich so as to help the poor?

FD: No, that's deceit — self-deceit.

A: What about to live on?

FD: We work and we earn what we need. But we do not become attached to this, you see; we do not aspire to this. A person who aspires to riches will never be able to live a normal life. If a person works as he ought and strives toward God, riches will come his way on their own; this has long been observed. But if a person strives toward riches, they will come, then disappear again: some sort of redenomination will occur, some new technical revolution, and all his money will trickle away. Some acquaintances of mine told me how they went to their summer house and began dismantling the wood box the previous owners (since deceased) had left there, and in the wood box they found a bag of 25- and 50-ruble bills. There were 500,000 Soviet rubles in there. And did those 500,000 rubles do them any good? God always arranges things to keep a person from becoming

attached to money. A person who is attached to money is, quite literally, a dead man. Kind David said: *If riches increase, set not your heart upon them* (Ps. 61). But a person who steals receives his reward from God. The fastest-dying stratum of society in Russia is that of thieves and the filthy rich. They are shot dead. I watched a crime report that said that on Rublevskoye Shosse three contract killings occur on average each month. That's on one little road. And this is natural, because this is God's way of punishing.

The next commandment says: *Thou shalt not bear false witness against they neighbor* (Ex. 20:16). In other words, on must neither bear false witness, nor listen to false witness. One must not bear false witness in court, or slander a person, because God is Truth, and falsehood is an abomination in His sight. A person must not lie, period. A person must speak the truth. A person must live in truth. Naturally, one must not use foul language and the like, so as not to defile one's speech. Speech is a gift from God, which must be used for good. This commandment likewise prohibits that favorite pastime of young ladies: discussing "all the latest gossip" about their friends of both sexes, because gossiping is one form of slander and falsehood. And this commandment requires that a person speak the honest truth, and that he live in truth. Speech is given to us so that we might praise God and praise those near us, not so that we might praise ourselves or lie and slander.

Finally, the last commandment, another popular one. It states: *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's* (Ex. 20:17). In other words, do not envy. Why? Because if you envy, once again this means that you are dissatisfied with God: "How could God not give that to a great guy like me?"

A: But there's such a thing as "white envy".

FD: Yes, and do you know where you can find a good description of it? In Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin's "The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish". That is a classic example of "white envy": I don't want someone else's possessions; I want the same things for myself. This is a form of white envy.

A: No, I mean when you rejoice at others' happiness.

FD: That's another matter; joy is a good thing. Note that when joy occurs we recognize God as the source of that joy, and then we say: "Glory to God!" This is a sure sign that the sentiment is a benevolent one, that this is a good thing.

And what is the antidote for envy? What is its opposite? Suppose, for example, you see that someone has their own private helicopter, and you say: "Glory to Thee, O Lord, that he has his own private helicopter! O Lord, send him another private helicopter." This is a good sentiment. This is called co-rejoicing. But if I say: "You have a helicopter! I want to have one just like it," that is envy. The antidote for envy, if envy is present, is co-rejoicing.

A: Is it really envy when you want the other person to keep on having what they have, and for you to have the same thing?

FD: It leads to the same thing that it did for the old woman: straight back to the broken washtub. This is what really happens, because envy is an insatiable feeling — absolutely insatiable. An envious person is the only person who never derives the slightest pleasure from his sin. A fornicator finds short-lived pleasure, then weeps for a long time afterward, but an envious person never finds any pleasure at all. This is because if I do get a helicopter just like you have, I'm going to promptly start wishing I had an airplane like yours. If I get the airplane, I'm going to start wishing I had a house in the Canary Islands like yours, and so on *ad infinitum*, until I'm left homeless in the gutter. Why does this happen? Because envy is a thing that literally destroys a person. So let us not envy, but rather fulfill the Lord's commandments, and may the grace of God be with you.

These are the fundamentals that you begin with. The apex is holiness, to which you are all called. You are being baptized for this purpose. God says: *And ye shall be holy unto Me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be Mine* (Lev. 20:26). *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect* (Mt. 5:48).

Are you prepared to walk the path of holiness? There is no middle ground! Either you're holy or you're in hell! Any stubborn passion with which you do not struggle will corrupt you. You have to fight it,

and not only fight it, but fight it and win! And you have to keep fighting until the day you die. Then you will be the victor. A holy person is one who is seized by the forces of eternal life, seized by the powers of eternity. This is why you must strive for holiness, strive toward God, and God will be with you. This is my wish for you. May the Spirit of the Lord, the Holy Spirit, illumine you all, and may the mercy of God be with you. The Lord save you!

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM IN MODERN PRACTICE

"As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ," the Church sings, receiving new children of God into her bosom. Indeed, what can be more beautiful that this sacrament of rebirth? In it people are cleansed of all their sins. The fire of the Holy Spirit recasts their whole nature, burning away the disease of ancient death. Baptism is a new birth by water and the Spirit of a spiritual man, participation in the death and Resurrection of the First-begotten, the destruction of the devil in the sacred waters, the permeation of the whole man with the effulgence of the Divinity. In the words of Saint Gregory the Theologian: "Enlightenment is a help in our infirmity, the setting aside of the flesh, adherence to the Spirit, communion with the Word, correction of the creation, the drowning of sin, imparting of the light, the dispelling of darkness. Enlightenment is a chariot elevating one to God, keeping company with Christ, fortification of faith, perfection of the mind, the key to the Kingdom of Heaven, a change of life, a release from slavery, deliverance from bondage, transformation of the body. Enlightenment is the best and most magnificent of God's gifts."

However, due to communist persecution in the twentieth century a number of practices have arisen in the Russian Church that grossly violate the apostolic tradition regarding how this sacrament is performed.

The first question that arises is this: can all children be baptized?

According to the Catechesis, children are baptized according to the faith of their godparents and parents. Furthermore, according to the 7th Canon of the 3rd Ecumenical Council, the standard of that faith is the Symbol of Faith of the Council of Nicaea. Here is the resolution: "… the holy council has resolved: let none be permitted to pronounce, or write, or compile another faith beside that defined by the Holy Fathers in the city of Nicaea, convened together with the Holy Spirit. As for such as dare to compile another faith, or to present or propose one to those wishing to convert to the knowledge of the truth — whether from paganism, from Judaism, or from any other heresy — if they be bishops or members of the clergy, let such bishops be deprived of their bishopric, and such clergymen of their clerical rank. If they be laymen, let them be given over to anathema." For this reason one who does not acknowledge even one of the dogmas of the Symbol of Faith cannot be baptized, nor can his children be baptized.

Canon 203 of the Rudder cited in the Great Book of Needs does not recognize as valid the baptism of infants who were baptized at the request of Muslim parents, since they did not possess the Orthodox faith, and hence the biblical requirement was not met: *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned* (Mk. 16:16). This institution was adopted by the Council of Constantinople under Patriarch Luke Chrysoberges. It was based on the 8th canon of the 7th Ecumenical

Council, which forbade baptizing Jewish children if their parents had not sincerely accepted Christianity.

The standards for the proper appointment of godparents are spelled out in particular. According to the standards of the Synodal period in the Russian Church, "...godparents may not be persons who are insane, who have no understanding of the faith, as well as criminals, open sinners, and in general all persons who have fallen greatly in the eyes of society through their moral behavior ... Those who have not been to confession and Holy Communion for 5–10 years, naturally through negligence, cannot give those whom they receive from the font the guidance and instruction in their lives that is the duty of the godparents."

Children of the heterodox, including those who do not acknowledge the holy Symbol of Faith, may be baptized only after their parents sign a statement that they will raise them in Orthodoxy (Synodal Edicts of 1722, II, 28; 1830, XII, 29; 1844, II, 18). According to the 1st canon of Timothy of Alexandria, all children older than seven years must undergo catechesis, which according to a synodal decree issued February 20, 1840, must last six months, though the ruling bishop is given the authority to reduce the duration in individual cases.

Thus, we see that priests at times grossly violate the holy canons by baptizing all children indiscriminately. They risk casting the sacred gift of baptism to demonic dogs.

Still more important is the question of baptizing adults. How are adults to be baptized, according

to the church rules currently in effect? *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost* (Mt. 28:19) — such was the unchanging command of Christ the Savior for all generations. In strict adherence to it, throughout her history the Orthodox Church has not immediately admitted to baptism all adults seeking the grace of the holy font, beginning at seven years of age, according to the 1st canon of Timothy of Alexandria. Rather, it has admitted them only after they have studied the fundamentals of the faith (the catechism) and renounced the errors of their previous confession. According to the 2nd canon of the 1st Ecumenical Council, "Inasmuch as, out of necessity or other human motivation, much has occurred contrary to the church canons, such that people who have come recently to the faith from a pagan lifestyle, and who have been catechumens but briefly, are quickly brought to the holy font, and immediately after baptism are elevated to the rank of bishop or priest: for this cause it is deemed good that henceforth this should not be repeated. This is because the catechumen requires time, and after baptism requires further testing. For the apostolic writing clearly proclaims: *Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil*. If over time any sin of the soul be discovered in any person, and if he be accused by two or three witnesses, let such a one be excluded from the clergy. And if anyone dare to act contrary to this, as one daring to oppose the great Council, he puts himself at risk of being expelled from the clergy." According to the liturgist

Archpriest Nikolsky, *The Order of Divine Services for Students* (*Uchebny ustav bogosluzhenie*, Saint Petersburg, 1907, pp. 663–665), the order of baptism cited in the Book of Needs is the culmination of the rite of unification, and is only served without this right for children under seven. This was the practice everywhere and at all times. In the Russian Church as well it was in common use right up until the revolution of 1917.

Thus, those who baptize without catechism are subject to being defrocked, according to this rule of the Council of Nicaea. How should catechesis take place? A person who wishes to learn about Christianity comes to church, asks questions, and listens (he may remain in the church until the exclamation: "As many as are catechumens, depart"). Once he has resolved to receive baptism, he is numbered with those "who are preparing for illumination". Since an adult hardly ever comes for baptism in a perfectly virginal state of religious ignorance, as a rule he requires the rite of unification. According to the 7th canon of the 2nd Ecumenical Council and the 95th canon of the Council of Trullo, "...all other heretics, all of them who desire to be united to Orthodoxy, we receive as pagans. On the first day we make them Christians, on the second — catechumens, then on the third we exorcise them, with the threefold breathing into their faces and ears; and thus we catechize them, and oblige them to abide in the Church, and listen to the Scriptures, and only then do we baptize them. The same holds for the Manicheans, the Valentinians, the Marcionites, and like heretics."

Incidentally, here we might list those Christian heretics that must be received into the Church through holy baptism. These include all Protestants except the Lutherans, Reformed Protestants, Anglicans, and Old Catholics. This, firstly, is because Protestants reject the regenerative power of holy baptism. They are convinced that baptism is merely a rite of loyalty, and not a birth of water and the Spirit. This is why we cannot acknowledge their rite as a sacrament. Secondly, the Baptists, Pentecostals, other sectarians (such as the Church of Christ — the so-called "Boston movement") that baptize through single immersion, which is expressly forbidden by the 7th canon of the 2nd Ecumenical Council, while others (such as the Methodists) baptize through aspersion (sprinkling), so that frequently not a single drop of water falls on the person being "baptized". The same kind of baptism is practiced by the Adventists, who distort the teaching about Christ's Divinity; the Jehovah's Witnesses, who reject the Holy Trinity; the radical heretics of the White Brotherhood and the Theotokian Center, the Molokans, the Pneumatomachians, *etc.*

People who are referred to as "the immersed", meaning those who were baptized by unknown persons at unknown times during the years of persecution, must also be baptized. Lay baptism may only be recognized when witnesses have explicitly and reliably stated that the sacrament was performed by triple immersion, using the proper baptismal formula. If there is the slightest doubt, the baptism must be repeated.

The baptisms of Old Believer doctrinarians also cannot be acknowledged, if there are no sure witnesses that the rite was properly performed. The fact is, there is a whole range of priestless Old Believer practices that radically distort the form of the sacrament.

As for other heretics and schismatics, they must be reunited by the means currently established by the hierarchy.

Immediately after such a decision the priest must ask the person whether or not he was previously baptized, and whether he wishes to be baptized for the sake of his salvation, and not for the sake of gain or some other temporary reason (such as his health or in order to marry). Upon learning that such is not the case, the priest gives the catechumen a Christian name. This rite is very important, because it spiritually protects the catechumen from the attacks of Satan, who does not wish to be parted from his slave. Prior to the revolution of 1917 the Church required the person being baptized to find himself a sponsor — a godparent who was willing to vouch for him. This rite takes place in the narthex, in front of the church doors. Following it the priest enters the altar and with bared head falls to his face before the altar table, thanking God for the conversion, and praying that he be given the grace to preach and that his mouth be opened to teach the catechumen the way of salvation. After the prayer the priest vests in the phelonion (the bishop vests in the mantle and takes his staff) and, kissing the holy altar table, goes out to the church doors. At this time the choir sings Psalm 33.

Standing inside the church doors, the priest asks the catechumen: "Who art thou?" The answer is: "I am one who desires to know the true God and who seeks salvation." Question: "What is thy purpose in coming to the Holy Church?" Answer: "To learn from her the true faith and to be united to her." Question: "What dost thou hope to gain from the true faith?" Answer: "Life eternal and blessed."

After this the officiant instructs him: "If thou desirest to have life eternal, thou must preserve the Orthodox catholic (universal) faith. This faith lies in confessing God, One in Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the Trinity in Unity, without mingling His Persons or dividing His essence. For there is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; however, there are not three Gods, but one God. And regarding the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, understand that He is at once God and Man: God, the Only-begotten Son of God the Father, begotten before all ages, and Man, Who took flesh from the Ever-virgin Mary; Who suffered in the flesh and was crucified on the Cross for our salvation, died, and resurrected; and the righteous shall inherit blessed life, while those who have done evil shall receive eternal torment for their works. This is the faith preached by the apostles, which the martyrs sealed by their blood, proclaimed by the Councils and all the fathers and teachers of the Church. And so thou also, believing, must keep the Lord's commandments, for faith without works is dead. The most ancient and greatest of the commandments are these: thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul, and thy neighbor as

thyself. In urging us to keep both these commandments, Christ our Savior commanded us to love our enemies, to do good to all them who offend us, and to turn away from every evil. The roots of evil are these: pride, greed, the lust of the flesh, envy, incontinence, anger, and sloth. But, inasmuch as thou desirest to become an heir of the Kingdom of Heaven, do thou overcome them by the virtues:

pride by humility,
greed by compassion,
lust of the flesh by chastity,
envy by co-rejoicing,
incontinence by sobriety and fasting,
and sloth by zeal for prayer, worship, and other works of piety."

When this instruction is finished, the priest asks: "Dost thou wish to receive this holy faith with thine heart and to maintain it invariably, to the end of thy days, and also to become accustomed to Christian virtues and, with God's help, to excel in them as thou art able?"

The catechumen replies: "Truly from my whole heart I wish to maintain this holy faith until my last breath, and to diligently live the life of the Gospel, praying to God for help."

Then the officiant says to him: "Bow the knee before the Lord our God."

He kneels and crosses his arms across his breast, kneeling before the doors.

The officiant, making the sign of the cross over his head thrice, says: "The servant of God (Name) is

signed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Deacon: "Let us pray to the Lord."

Choir: "Lord, have mercy."

The bishop or priest, standing before the catechumen, reads this prayer:

"Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who from among all the nations callest forth the elect, those zealous for good works. Do Thou now also bless Thy servant (Name) who hath come to Thy holy Church: open the eyes of his soul unto the understanding of the wonders of Thy providence for us, and open the ears of his heart unto the receiving of Thy divine words, that at a seasonable time he may be vouchsafed the laver of regeneration and the garment of incorruption. Thou hast snatched the soul of this Thy servant from the deception of the evil one; do Thou therefore preserve it unharmed by the attacks of the enemy, and vouchsafe it to become a habitation of Thy grace. For Thine it is to deliver us from the wiles of the evil one, and to Thee we offer up glory and thanksgiving, now and unto the ages of ages."

Choir: "Amen."

After this begins the rite of the making of a catechumen. The catechumen spends the days that follow in fasting and prayer (in ancient times a forty-day fast was considered obligatory; currently no less than three days is recommended). He comes to the temple of God at the beginning of the church services, and stands near the church doors until the exclamation of the deacon: "Catechumens, depart", and sighing with contrition of heart over his former darkness

of mind he prays with tears to be vouchsafed holy baptism. According to the 19th canon of the Council of Laodicea, at the Liturgy of the catechumens a sermon should be given on Holy Scripture as interpreted by the holy fathers (the 19th canon of the Council of Trullo): "It is meet, firstly, after the homilies of the bishop, to pray especially for the catechumens, and, following their departure, for intercession to be made for the penitents; and when these also have approached for the blessing and departed, then to accomplish the prayer of the faithful."

The 8th canon of Theophilus of Alexandria does not permit catechumens to partake of prosphoron and antidoron; but the ancient practice of the Church of Jerusalem permits them to venerate the icons and the Life-giving Cross.

His spiritual guide must teach him the faith, explain the sacred dogmas, show him the power of the Holy Mysteries, impress upon him to obey the commandments of the Gospel and the Church, and, when alone, try him as to whether he is approaching the Orthodox faith out of a sincere, heartfelt desire and without hypocrisy. In the Church a special cleric was formerly assigned for this, one with a gift for words, whose duty it was to teach those being baptized.

According to the synodal resolution of February 20, 1840, catechesis must last forty days. During that time the person preparing for baptism must correct his behavior, leave any profane jobs he may hold, and strive to correct his way of life. The 5th canon of the Council of Neocaesarea states that if one who is preparing for baptism commits a mortal sin during this

time, his baptism is postponed. According to the 14th canon of the 1st Eccumenical Council, if during catechesis a catechumen falls away by committing an act of idolatry or taking part in a foreign religious rite, his baptism is postponed by three years. But if his life is in danger he must be baptized immediately, according to the 5th canon of St. Cyril of Alexandria.

If the baptism is to take place on Great Saturday, the most opportune day for this sacrament, the baptismal registry is closed on the second week of Great Lent, according to the 45th canon of the Council of Laodicea.

During this period the catechumen must learn and understand the Symbol of Faith, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and "O Theotokos Virgin". He must also present a signed statement that he will unfailingly remain a member of the Church. The statement must be as follows: "I the undersigned, (full name, current confession), hereby declare my firm intention to join the Orthodox Catholic Eastern Church, and promise to remain always and invariably in obedience to her." This must be followed by his signature, the date, and the signatures of the priest and godparents.

Each Friday the catechumen must report to the bishop or priest regarding the above, so that his human understanding might assimilate this greatest revelation of the Creator. The 46th canon of the Council of Laodicea and the 78th canon of the Council of Trullo state: "Those preparing for baptism must study the faith, and on the fifth day of the week must

give a report to the bishop or the presbyters." In this way he is guarded from being drawn into sects.

According to the 39th epistle of Saint Athanasius, catechumens ought especially to study the "non-canonical books of Scripture": "In addition to these, there are other books not included in the canon, but appointed by the fathers to be read by those new to the faith who wish to be catechized with the word of piety: the Wisdom of Solomon, the Wisdom of Sirach, Esther, Judith, and Tobit, and what is known as the Teaching of the Apostles, and the Pastor." The ancient liturgical practice of the Orthodox Church commands that catechumens study the books of Genesis, Exodus, and Proverbs, and of the Prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Job. Immediately before baptism all the Gospels are to be read, and immediately after the sacrament — the Book of Acts (this practice has been preserved to this day in the order for Great Lent).

It should be emphasized that it is not permissible to impart to catechumens the order of the Liturgy of the Faithful and the symbolism behind the order of the Eucharist. For the Lord Himself commanded: *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you* (Mt. 7:6). These mysteries are imparted to the newly-baptized only after the sacrament. As Saint Cyril of Jerusalem writes: "Then, as the catechetical homily states, if a catechumen asks you what your teachers have told you, tell nothing to him who is without. For it is a mystery that we teach you, and the hope of the future age.

Preserve this mystery for the sake of the Bestower of Rewards, and do not listen when anyone says to you: Would it really be so terrible for me to learn of this? For the sick also ask for wine, but if it is given at the wrong time it will make them mad, causing a twofold evil: the sick person dies, and the physician is disgraced. So also if a catechumen hears anything from a believer, the catechumen likewise falls into madness, because he does not understand what he hears, and instead disparages and mocks what is said; and the believer is condemned as a betrayer of this mystery. Behold, you have already drawn near to us: see that you do not tell others, not because what is preached here is not fit to be told, but because their ears are not fit to hear it. You, too, were once a catechumen, and I did not tell you what lay before you. When by experience you have understood the heights of this teaching, then you will know that catechumens are unworthy to hear it" (Catechetical Talks, 1:12).

After the time of catechesis has ended, and the catechumen has repented of his sins, as the Scripture says: *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ* (Acts 2:38), the time comes for the pre-baptismal examination.

After sufficient time for the tutelage has passed, after vespers in the presence of the whole community the officiant vests in his priestly robes, as has been said, makes three prostrations before the altar table, kisses its edge, then exits the altar and goes out to the church doors. The choir sings Psalm 8.

The one being catechized stands in the porch, facing the temple. The officiant then says to him:

"Behold, my child, the time of your instruction is completed. Thus, though you have been asked apart whether you desire to be a Christian for the sake of Christ and the salvation of your soul, you must additionally declare this before the assembly of the church, and deny the former false belief in which you abode, and confess plainly the Orthodox faith."

After this the one being baptized loudly renounces the false views of the confession to which he formerly adhered. A pagan renounces veneration of created things rather than the Creator, worshipping idols, and participation in pagan rituals (including magic, astrology, and the like). A Muslim renounces all the false doctrines of Islam: that the Koran is divinely inspired, the Muhammad is God's messenger, the practice of Hajj, polygamy, and sensual Islamic eschatology. The Jews renounce blasphemy of Christ, the Theotokos, and the saints, the necessity of keeping the Mosaic Law, the fables of the Talmud, and their expectation of the Antichrist (the Jewish false messiah). Heretics renounce their various heresies.

Then the officiant asks: "Dost thou unite thyself truly, without hypocrisy, and doubting nothing, with all thy soul, to the One True God, glorified in Trinity, and dost thou believe in Him?"

And the catechumen replies: "I unite myself truly, without hypocrisy, and without any doubt whatsoever, with all my soul, to the One True God, glorified in Trinity, and I believe in Him."

The time has now arrived for the second catechesis, when the one being baptized plainly confesses the Orthodox faith.

Question: "Dost thou confess that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One God, undivided in essence, in three Persons? And dost thou believe in Him and dost thou worship Him?"

Answer: "Thus do I believe, confess, and worship the Triune God."

Question: "Dost thou believe and confess that Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary for our salvation, and became man, without ceasing to be God, in one Hypostasis but in two natures, the Divine and the human, without change or comingling?"

Answer: "This do I believe and this do I confess."

Question: "Dost thou believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, not out of necessity but voluntarily, truly, and not in illusory manner, suffered in the flesh for us, without suffering in His Divinity, and by the power of His Divinity rose again, ascended into the Heavens in the flesh, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father, from whence He shall come again to judge the living and the dead, and will reign, and His kingdom shall have no end?"

Answer: "This do I believe with my heart, and with my mouth do I confess all this without hypocrisy."

Question: "Dost thou believe that the Virgin Mary, who gave birth to Christ our God, is Ever-virgin and truly the Birth-giver of God, and for this cause it is meet to honor her as more honorable and exalted

than the bodiless hosts, and to piously bow down before her as the foremost intercessor for us to God?"

Answer: "All this regarding the Ever-virgin Mary do I confess: I honor her as the Mother of God, and in prayer do I flee to her."

Question: "Dost thou believe that the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ Who was crucified upon it is no longer the instrument of the curse and of execution, but the sign of salvation and life eternal, by which, in signing it upon ourselves, we evade the snares of the enemy?"

Answer: "Thus do I believe concerning the Lord's Cross, and by this saving sign will I strive to guard myself with hope from the snares of the evil one."

Question: "Dost thou believe that in His Holy Church our Lord Jesus Christ established seven sacraments as necessary — baptism, chrismation, Communion, confession, ordination, marriage, and unction — and that through the grace bestowed in them Christ's servants become heirs of eternal life?"

Answer: "Thus do I believe regarding the holy sacraments, and I do confess that these seven are necessary in God's Church for the salvation of her children."

Question: "Dost thou believe that the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments preserved by the Church were spoken by holy men of God, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and for the sake thereof dost thou accept these Scriptures as inspired by God and salvific? Dost thou part company with those who do not accept them and who blaspheme them?"

Answer: "The Holy Scriptures, preserved by the Church as divinely inspired and holy, do I accept as the Word of God, given us for our salvation; and with those who do not accept them and who blaspheme them do I part company."

Question: "Dost thou hold the traditions of the apostles and the holy fathers and the rites and prayers that our Church contains to be unto salvation of soul, and dost thou accept them?"

Answer: "All this do I hold to be unto salvation of soul, and I do promise to adhere to them insomuch as this is required of me."

Question: "Dost thou believe that the apostles, martyrs, and all the saints whom our Church reveres and invokes in prayer are truly pleasers of God, abide with Christ in the Kingdom of Heaven, and pray for us sinners?"

Answer: "I believe, and from henceforth I do call upon the holy pleasers of God in prayer."

Question: "Dost thou accept for veneration the honored icons depicting the faces of Christ, the Mother of God, and the saints, as established in the Orthodox Church, and dost thou renounce those who blaspheme them?"

Answer: "I accept the honored icons, to bow down before the holy faces depicted thereon after the order of the Church, and do renounce those who blaspheme them."

Question: "Dost thou confess all this that thou hast now said with all thy soul and all thy mind? Dost thou not come to the Christian faith under duress,

and dost thou wish to be vouchsafed holy baptism from a free inclination?"

Answer: "I do truly confess all that I have said, and do promise to maintain this until the end of my life. Of my own inclination and without hypocrisy do I come to the Christian faith, and I desire with all my soul to receive saving baptism."

Then the officiant says: "If it be truly as thou hast said, confirm this before the Church by an oath."

The other then reads, or, if he cannot read, repeats each word after a godparent or the clergyman who reads it:

"I, (Name), who come to the Christian faith from Islam (or another confession, which is named), do now before the All-seeing God confirm by my oath that not under duress or through fear, nor out of oppression from those of my faith, nor for the sake of gain or for any other hidden reason, do I renounce the false faith of Islam and all heresies and foul blasphemies contained therein, and do come to the saving Christian faith, but solely for the salvation of my soul, being overcome by the very truth of this faith and drawn by my heartfelt love for Christ the Savior, do I wish to be a Christian and desire to be vouchsafed holy baptism. If I now confess this out of hypocrisy, and do not approach Christ God out of heartfelt desire, and if hereafter I should dare to renounce the Christian faith and return to Islam (or another faith), may the wrath of God and eternal condemnation come upon me. Amen."

The catechumen then seals this pledge by kissing the cross and the Gospel. After this the priest says:

"Blessed is God, Who desirest that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Amen."

Deacon: "Ye catechumens, bow your heads unto the Lord."

Choir: "To Thee, O Lord."

When the catechumen has bowed his head, the deacon says: "Let us pray to the Lord."

The officiant reads this prayer: "O great God, Who didst enlighten the original darkness and didst send down Thy Son for the cleansing of our fallen nature, do Thou also lead Thy servant (Name), who hath bowed his head before Thee, out of the darkness of sin to the light of Thy divine understanding: cleanse him from defilement, deliver him from the wiles of the adversary, and unite him to Thy chosen flock, granting him a part and lot in the Church of Thy saints. For Thou art our God, and blessed art Thou unto the ages."

Choir: "Amen."

After this, sealing the catechumen with the sign of the cross and looking toward the altar, he says this prayer: "O great and wondrous God, Who callest those who have gone astray, and Who hast said: Return unto Me and I will return unto you; and Who receivest him who turneth to Thee, according to Thy word: Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out! Do Thou Thyself receive this Thy servant (Name) who cometh to Thee from the delusion of his path: preserve him by Thy grace, lead him into the courts of Thy Church; open to him the gates of truth, which having entered he may escape every delusion, lie, and falsehood. Send to him an angel to accompany him on the right path, on which he hath found

Thee, our Savior and God; strengthen his faith, hope, and pure love, and reveal Thy face in him, that he may be vouchsafed the laver of regeneration and the garment of incorruption, and thus may begin to walk in newness of life. For Thine it is to have mercy, to enlighten, and to save us, and to Thee do we send up glory, to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and unto the ages."

Choir: "Amen."

If there are many catechumens, they should all be named, and each awaits baptism. If a person's life is in danger, he is baptized on the condition that he sincerely desired this beforehand. Even if a person has lost his mental health due to illness, but previously desired to be baptized, he may be baptized according to the faith of his relatives, if he is not in a state of possession, according to the 4th canon of Timothy of Alexandria. A possessed catechumen should not receive baptism until the impure spirit has been driven out of him. The only exception to this is if his life is in danger, according to the 2nd canon of Timothy of Alexandria.

Baptism may likewise be accelerated if by Divine Providence the catechumen accidentally communes, in accordance with the 1st canon of Timothy of Alexandria. If a woman's period begins, she must postpone holy baptism, according to the 6th canon of Timothy of Alexandria.

THE APOSTOLIC PRACTICE OF THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM AND ITS DISTORTION

The Lord Jesus Christ, in commanding the apostles to give men rebirth in baptism, also gave a rule for how this sacrament is to be performed. The Lord relayed the baptismal rituals themselves after His Resurrection. As Saint Basil the Great testifies in his *Book on the Holy Spirit*: "Of the beliefs and practices which are preserved in the Church, whether generally accepted or publicly enjoined, some we possess derived from written teaching; others we have received delivered to us in a mystery by the tradition of the apostles; and both of these are equally valid for true religion. And these no one will gainsay — no one, at all events, who is even moderately versed in the institutions of the Church. For were we to attempt to reject such customs as have no written authority, on the grounds that they are of little importance, we should unintentionally injure the Gospel in its very vitals; or, rather, should make our public definition a mere phrase and nothing more. … Moreover we bless the water of baptism and the oil of the chrism, and besides this the catechumen who is being baptized. On what written authority do we do this? Is not our authority silent and mystical tradition? Nay, by what written word is the anointing of oil itself taught? And whence comes the custom of baptizing thrice? And as to the other customs of baptism, from what Scripture

do we derive the renunciation of Satan and his angels? Does not this come from that unpublished and secret teaching which our fathers guarded in silence, out of the reach of curious meddling and inquisitive investigation? What the uninitiated are not even allowed to look at was hardly likely to be publicly paraded about in written documents." Further on he writes: "This is the reason for our tradition of unwritten precepts and practices, that the knowledge of our dogmas may not become neglected and condemned by the multitude through familiarity. Dogma and kerygma are two distinct things: the former is observed in silence, while the latter is proclaimed to all the world. One form of this silence is the obscurity employed in Scripture, which makes the meaning of dogmas difficult to be understood for the very advantage of the reader".

These words of the hierarch are confirmed by the Church as the 91st canon. As the hierarch says, all these norms of tradition imbue the sacrament with no little power. Unfortunately, however, thanks to the carelessness of certain priests, these sacred rites are performed distortedly, and those baptized suffer considerable spiritual harm at the hands of these wretched pastors. There was one case when an unhappy mother came to a certain elder at the Pskov Caves Monastery, to complain of her wayward son, whom a demon was driving from one "place of iniquity" to the next. To this the elder replied: "He walks as he was anointed to walk." And indeed, it turned out that at baptism the priest had not anointed his feet with oil, and

thereby failed to preserve him from the bite of the ancient serpent.

This is why it is essential to examine the church norms for this sacrament.

1. When is it appropriate to perform the rebirth? Certainly, if someone's life is in danger one may baptize at any time of day or night. If there is no such threat, however, the church norms must be maintained. The Nomocanon as cited by the Great Book of Needs states: "If a priest hath eaten, let him not baptize, for this is also a service of God. Only in case of great need let him baptize" (206). "Likewise during the great Quadragesima one ought not to baptize, except in case of great need" (207). "Holy baptism should take place before the Divine Liturgy, that the child might commune at the Liturgy, when the time comes, that is, except in case of need; for this must take place together with the Liturgy. The name of the child is given in baptism" (208). The ancient Church, citing the words of the apostle Paul (Rom. 6), appointed the feast of Pascha in particular for this sacrament. Later this came to include the days of Theophany, Pentecost, Christ's Nativity, and Lazarus Saturday. Before the revolution, adults were usually baptized before the twelve great feasts or before a Sunday Liturgy. In 1993 His Holiness Patriarch Aleksei II blessed a baptismal liturgy to be served. Baptism must absolutely be served together with the parish deacon and chanter.

Indeed, if we compare current practice with these rules for performing the sacrament one cannot help but be astounded by how far it has departed

from what the Church requires. Usually we see people who have undergone no preparation whatsoever, with unprepared, half-believing godparents, baptized in some hole in the wall — the service relentlessly abbreviated, the form of the sacrament distorted, dirty, unpresentable vestments, the parishioners paying no attention. And frequently, contrary to the prohibitions of a whole series of Russian councils against "multi-voiced singing", in a single church there will be a panikhida, a moleben, and a baptism being served at the same time. Furthermore, the order of the sacrament itself is sometimes lumped together — for instance, the epistle is read at the same time that "As many as have been baptized" is being sung, or the Symbol of Faith is read during the exorcisms.

It's remarkable after all this that some people still keep coming to church. Where is the common joy? Where is the beauty of God, greeting the newborn? The angels in Heaven rejoice, but the Church on earth meets him with silence and preoccupation. It is absolutely necessary to restore the standard practice of public baptism, so that the whole Orthodox community might greet its new brother-in-arms, so that Christians do not forget the newly-baptized. It is not for nothing that Saint Symeon of Thessalonica wrote: "It is necessary that all the faithful be present then with all possible reverence and joy, in the conviction that the angels are present together with them, rejoicing in the one sinner who repented" (Talk on the Sacred Rites and Sacraments of the Church, 30).

2. The Exorcisms. One of the most frightful and spiritually dangerous abbreviations of the holy sacrament encountered today in liturgical practice consists of the partial or even complete omission of the prayers casting out the devil. This is the result of disbelief in the existence of evil spirits; and of the liberal conviction that children are completely sinless, and hence immune to the influence of evil forces; and of a negligent attitude toward the practice of exorcism, inspired by certain theologians. The reason for this disbelief is the literal denial of original sin.

The fact that his troubles are the fault of the priest is of no benefit to the one baptized. After all, according to Saint Symeon of Thessalonica: "The priest undertakes to perform the sacred prayers and pronounce them with attention, without rushing, if there be no extreme need, and to read them aloud. We have heard from the fathers that those who are frequently haunted by ghosts suffer this because the priests who baptized them did not pronounce the exorcisms and other sacred prayers attentively" (Conversation on the Sacred Rites and Sacraments of the Church, 29). Contemporary pastoral experience also plainly confirms this.

3. Confessing the Symbol of Faith in current practice has also departed from the apostolic practice. Whereas at the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch the one baptized was required to confess his faith in Christ, nowadays this sacred confession is frequently read by the priest or a server. There is no personal promise of fidelity to Christ. The one being

baptized or the godparent is not required to know the Symbol of Faith by heart, and there is no examination of his knowledge. Yet this very confession possesses salvific power. For the apostle says: … *if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved* (Rom. 10:9–10).

4, The Blessing of Water. Very frequently today, instead of blessing water each time the sacrament is performed, according to the church service order, people take all kinds of shortcuts: they bless baptismal water ahead of time and keep it in a special bottle, or baptize in holy water from Theophany, or even from the lesser blessing of water. But all these means of "shaving off" five minutes contradict both the service order and the dictates of the Church. Storing baptismal water was expressly prohibited by order of the Holy Synod on June 17 and 18, 1733. And water from Theophany and the lesser blessing of water do not have the regenerative power required to perform the sacrament. For as Symeon of Thessalonica says, after the appointed blessing "the font is abundantly filled with the Spirit, containing the blessed water and, invisibly therein, Christ." The prayers of the moleben itself shows that water blessed then does not have the power of "the water of deliverance, the enlightenment of souls, the laver of regeneration, renewal of the spirit, bestowal of adoption to sonship, the garment of incorruption", so that the person immersed therein might be remade in the image of the Creator and shed the old man. It does not join him to the

likeness of death, and does not make him a partaker in the Resurrection. All these gifts are bestowed only through water blessed after the order of the sacrament, water filled abundantly with the special inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Epistle of the Eastern Patriarchs). So one ought not to depart from the sacred service order established by the Holy Spirit through the holy apostles.

Those priests sin who pour the baptismal water down the drain. They violate canon 199 of the Nomocanon: "… see that you have a separate place, untrodden, for pouring out these great sacred things which remain after baptism when you baptize a child: for this is something most sacred" (Gr. ἁΥίασμα — "a thing sacred"; Church Slavonic *svyataya voda* — "holy water").

5. The Blessing of Oil. Another thing that is frequently distorted in practice is the anointing with the oil of exorcism. This sacred rite is of great significance. According to St. John of Damascus, "at baptism oil is taken, symbolizing our anointing and making us anointed ones, proclaiming to us God's mercy through the Holy Spirit, since the dove likewise brought an olive branch to those preserved from the Flood." (*A Precise Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book 4, chapter IX, "On Faith and Baptism".)

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem explains this rite in more detail: "Then, having disrobed, you were anointed with the oil of exorcism, from your head even to your feet, and were made communicants of the good olive tree, Jesus Christ. For having been cut off from a wild olive tree you were grafted to a good

olive tree, and became communicants of the fat of the good olive tree. Thus, the oil of exorcism signified participation in Christ's anointing, which repels every trace of adverse power. As the breathing of the saints, like a most intense flame, scorches and drives away the demons, so also this oil of exorcism, through the invocation of God and prayer, will likewise receive a power that not only cleanses, burning up the traces of sins, but also drives out all the invisible powers of the evil one" (Catechetical Talk 20, On the Mysteries, II, 3).

Naturally, in order for the symbolism of the sacred rite to be realized, only olive oil must be used. Unfortunately, however, frequently paraffin oil, sunflower oil, or some other oil is used, often with fragrances added. Frequently the oil is not blessed; instead, oil from the all-night vigil or even oil from a lampada is used. In other cases, previously-blessed oil is diluted with unblessed oil. Before the revolution the standard was that "oil must always be clean, fresh, and unmixed with any other liquid. One must not use any oil for this, such as linseed oil, sunflower oil, or even lampada oil and the like. The best thing in this case is to acquire virgin or regular olive oil, which must be blessed with the prayer specifically appointed for this in the order of baptism. For baptism one ought not to use oil blessed at the all-night vigil, or oil used in the sacrament of unction or for blessing houses." In his Book of Needs, Saint Peter Mogila says: "… the oil for anointing catechumens is blessed not by the bishop, but by the priest; for this cause let the priest always take care to have

fresh oil for blessing, and let him not bless the same oil twice or multiple times, but as many times as he shall baptize let him bless new oil."

6. Baptism by Immersion. One of the most painful and gross violations in performing the sacrament of baptism is baptizing by effusion (pouring), or even by sprinkling, for no apparent reason. Due to this distortion many hundreds of Christians are confused as to whether their spiritual birth was indeed valid. Many commune unto judgment and condemnation because of this. Dozens of schisms profit by this distortion, claiming that many Christians, even bishops, are not actually baptized. The priests' criminal laziness and indifference give rise to conflicts between local churches. The churches of Greece and Mount Sinai and Holy Mount Athos doubt the validity of baptism by effusion (to say nothing of baptism by sprinkling), yet our censer-swingers cannot be troubled to furnish their churches with a simple barrel! And this despite the fact that His Holiness the Patriarch (along with many other bishops) has demanded *each year* for over 15 years that baptism be performed exclusively by immersion! But the "effusionists" brazenly claim that it makes no difference how they baptize, that this is mere "ritualism", and has absolutely nothing to do with the essence of the sacrament. They care nothing for the opinion and the words of God, the tradition of the Church, and the dictates of their own hierarchs. The only means of rectifying this situation may be to resort to canonical sanctions for impudent disobedience to the will of the ruling archpastor. As for

the validity of baptism by effusion, those perturbed by this issue must resolve it with the ruling bishop for their particular cases. For it is the bishop who has judicial authority in his own diocese.

But now it is time we substantiated the proper means of performing the sacrament. Baptism by triple immersion is expressly required by the Word of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ received baptism through total immersion in the waters of the Jordan. It is no accident that the Gospel says: *And straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him* (Mk. 1:10; Mt. 3:16). The very word "baptism" used in the Gospel (Gr. βάπτιση — "immersion into water") literally means "immersion". Hence, the statement "the immersion was performed by effusion" sounds an absurdity. We know that the holy apostles, having received the commandment to baptize all nations (Mt. 28:19), performed the sacrament specifically through immersion. This is also borne out by the example of St. Philip, who went down together with the eunuch into the water for baptism (Acts 8:38). When the proponents of effusion point out that, supposedly, on the day of Pentecost the apostles could not have immersed three thousand men (Acts 2:41), and hence poured water over the newly-baptized, they are absolutely wrong. In actuality, every Jewish home had a mikvah (basin) for the daily ritual ablutions. On Mount Zion remnants of dozens of mikvahs have been found, in which this original baptism was apparently performed.

It is no accident that it is this means of baptism that the canons decree canonical. The 50th canon of the holy apostles states: "If anyone, bishop or presbyter, does not perform three immersions in a single sacramental rite, but performs only one immersion, into the death of the Lord, let him be deposed. For the Lord said not: Baptize into My death; but: Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Likewise, the 91st canon of St. Basil the Great specifically calls the custom of triple immersion a mystical apostolic tradition. The heretics' violation of this standard, according to the 7th canon of the 2nd and the 95th canon of the 6th Ecumenical Councils, was sufficient grounds for their rebaptism. It is true that both church tradition and the canons (the 7th canon of the Council of Neocaesarea) provide for baptizing a person through effusion in exceptional (and only exceptional) circumstances. But the Church rejects as false reasoning any attempt to make this practice the standard. The most striking example of this is the resolutions of the Council of Constantinople in 1755 (to this day in force on Athos) and the Moscow Council of 1620, which reject the validity of Latin baptism specifically because Rome normalized baptism by pouring or even sprinkling.

It is no accident that the 1848 Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs calls the introduction of sprinkling instead of immersion the "vile spawn" of the filioque heresy and an "innovation contradictory to the Gospel". In the same way, all the Russian works

opposing Catholicism denounce this innovation of the Western Church as un-Orthodox. The venerable Kollyvades fathers (Nicodimos of the Holy Mountain, Macarius of Corinth, and others) considered it impossible to recognize Catholics and Lutherans as baptized specifically because the sacrament was performed by sprinkling.

This emphasis on the form of the sacrament is by no means meaningless ritualism. Saint Gregory Palamas explained the meaning of immersion as follows: "Water possesses cleansing properties, but not in relation to souls; and for one immersed therein it has the ability to wash away dirt, but not the defilement that originates from the root of sin. Hence, in order to endow it with these properties, for our sake the Physician of souls and Father of spirits Who is baptized, Christ, Who takes away the sin of the world, the forefeast of Whose baptism we celebrate this day, is immersed into it. For together with Himself He imbued the water with the grace of the Most-holy Spirit, which He drew down from on high, so that for those who would later be baptized in Him, by being immersed into the water, He might Himself be there with His Spirit, communicating Himself to them ineffably and assimilated by them, and filling rational creatures with cleansing and illuminating grace. And this is what the divine Paul says: … *as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ* (Gal. 3:27). The three immersions into water take place in the name of the saving invocation of the Life-creating Trinity, but they also depict the Lord's three-day burial.

The immersions are followed by an equal number of emergences from the water, because otherwise three immersions could not take place. These signify alike the resurrection (or arising) from sin, the three-part nature of the soul, and the raising up to incorruption of these three: the mind, the soul, and also the body. Thus, in divine baptism we see both death and life, burial and resurrection, in the image of the Lord, Who *in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God* (Rom. 6:10); as He himself says: … *for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me* (Jn. 14:30). And so it must be with regard to us, who were baptized into His death, because through divine baptism, having died unto sin, we must live unto God by means of virtue, that the prince of darkness, when he comes and seeks, might not find in us anything to please him. And as after Christ rose from the dead *death hath no more dominion over Him* (Rom. 6:9), so also we, after arising through divine baptism from our fall into sin, must take care that sin have power over us no more. *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life* (Rom. 6:3; homily on what takes place in the rite of the sacrament of baptism, which also treats on repentance and what John the Baptism said regarding this, given on the eve of the feast of Theophany, 3).

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem adds this to Gregory's words: "You have confessed a saving confession, and have been immersed thrice into the water, and emerged from the water again. And in this you have symbolically portrayed Christ's three-day burial. For as the Savior abode three days and three nights in the bowels of the earth (Mt. 12:40), so also by your first emergence from the water you portrayed the first day, and by your immersion the first night that Christ abode in the earth. For as a person ceases at night to see, but during the day goes about in the light, similarly in your immersion, as in the night, you saw nothing, but in emerging from the water you were as in the day. And at the same time you died and were born: and this saving water was for you both tomb and mother. And what Solomon said regarding other things befits you also. There it is said: *a time to be born, and a time to die* (Eccl. 3:2); but for you it is the reverse: a time to die and a time to be born. And a single moment accomplished both the one and the other: both your death and your birth were conjoined. O strange and wondrous thing! we did not really die, neither were we really buried, nor were we really resurrected after crucifixion, but our imitation was in a figure, and our salvation in reality. Christ was truly crucified, truly buried, and truly resurrected; and all this He gave us by grace, that in becoming participants in His sufferings by imitation we might find salvation in reality. O incomprehensible love for mankind! Christ received nails in His most-pure hands and feet, and endured suffering, and to me, though I bore no pain and suffering,

grants salvation solely through participation in His sufferings." (Catechetical Lecture 20, On the Mysteries, II, 4–5.)

And so it turns out that one who distorts the apostolic form of the sacrament disrupts the symbol of rebirth. But for us this symbol is by no means meaningless. It is participation in the reality of the Lord's death and Resurrection! How then can one believe the form of baptism to be irrelevant to salvation?

As we have said, effusion or sprinkling may be occasioned only by highly extraordinary circumstances. Yes, both in church history and in the lives of the saints we see examples of God-pleasing baptisms performed in this way, but all of them were occasioned by illness or severe persecution. Yes, according to ancient tradition the apostle Peter baptized those who believed in the Mamertine Prison in a spring which he caused to flow from the cliff, and St. Laurence baptized prisoners by effusion. Baptism by effusion was practiced in the desert, and also in times of illness. But how can this be compared to the practice of baptizing by sprinkling without undressing, without even removing the person's stockings (and hence without anointing the feet with holy chrism), in Russia with its abundant water sources, where a large barrel (or even a beautiful font) can be purchased for a paltry sum?

It is my firm conviction that baptism by effusion is permissible only for the gravely ill, whose mobility is restricted, or for prisoners, soldiers fighting in arid regions, desert dwellers, if there

are no large water sources, or in the tundra at subzero temperatures, when no suitable heated facility is available.

Baptism by sprinkling is permissible only for patients in intensive care, who cannot have water poured over them completely (for instance, a dying infant in an incubator). But every effort should still be made to moisten as much of the body as possible with holy water.

In all other cases the requirement of the 200th canon of the Nomocanon must be followed: "When you baptize a child, have a font or tub or vessel, such as a bowl or some other appropriate vessel. And when you pour oil into the font, as the service order dictates, take oil from the bowl with the three fingers, and anoint the child on all his members, as the service order says, and then take him naked and, setting him upright, baptize him in three immersions, saying thus: The servant of God (Name) is baptized in the name of the Father. Amen. And lower him into the font, and immerse him, meaning to wet him completely. And again rise partway, raising up the infant, and lower him into the water a second time, and wet him, saying: And of the Son. Amen. And again arise, and lower him a third time, saying likewise: And of the Holy Spirit. Amen. And bathe him the final time. Then, taking him from the font, give him to the godparent." Then the baptized person is clothed in white garments, and the priest puts a cross on him, and sings Psalm 31 together with the people. The custom of singing this psalm has its origins in Scripture, where the apostle Paul cites it,

indicating the blessedness of one justified by Christ (Rom. 4:5–9).

This is the standard for the sacrament, and both the bishops and the dean must see that it is observed. But the church laity also must not fail to attend to this aspect of our faith. For according to the Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs, "among us neither patriarchs nor councils could ever introduce anything new, because for us the guardian of piety is the Body of Christ itself, that is, the people themselves, who always desire to preserve their faith unchanging and in accordance with the faith of their fathers." (Encyclical of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church to all Orthodox Christians, 1848, par. 17.) Hence, if any pastor departs from similar divinely-instituted standards of baptism by immersion, the flock must humbly point out his error, and if he persists they must take the matter to the ruling bishop, that this lawlessness may be utterly uprooted in the holy churches of God. This age-old right and duty of the laity was reaffirmed by the Holy Synod (on December 28, 1998), which resolved "to summon all the faithful of the Orthodox Church to approach their ruling bishop in every case when a pastor and spiritual father oversteps his God-given authority to bind and to loose; to remind the Orthodox flock that the advice of a spiritual father must not contradict Holy Scripture, Holy Tradition, the teaching of the holy fathers, and the canonical establishments of the Orthodox Church; and that if their advice should contradict these establishments preference must be given to the latter" (article 12).

PREPARING ADULTS FOR BAPTISM: THEORY AND PRACTICE

To conclude my study, so as not to seem an idealistic dreamer, I will cite how we have conducted catechesis for nearly seven years at the Moscow metochion of the Optina Hermitage (Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Yasneva), and for over a year at St. Thomas Church.

Under normal conditions, adult preparation for baptism lasts for five weeks. Each Friday, after the evening service, benches are set up in the church, and a talk begins that lasts for about two hours. Anyone who wishes may be present — catechumens, interested persons, and parishioners. All who wish to receive baptism write their names in a book, usually including a telephone number so they can be reached. From then on, note is taken of which talks the catechumen has attended. One can start with any of the talks, but must subsequently be present for all five. To avoid the need for getting a group together, in the course of each talk we introduce general concepts (Who God is, what sin and good are, *etc.*). Experience has shown that if you tell a person to come back in a month, he usually will not. If you start working with a person immediately, however, the picture changes: his interest is aroused, and God draws him to Himself. Naturally, the catechizer must unfailingly pray before beginning the lesson and in difficult situations.

To keep people from becoming bored, and the talk from becoming a useless lecture, it is necessary to constantly give examples and ask how a person understands this or that concept (God, Christ, the Bible, the Church, sin, good, *etc.*). From there the topic should be developed using the catechumen's definition as a point of reference. If it is correct, expand on it. If not, explain why not, and use this to demonstrate the truth. Attention should be given to the listeners' facial expressions, so as not to miss the point at which they lose the thread of reasoning. The length of the talk may be adjusted depending on the circumstances, but not at the expense of covering all the material.

At the start of the talk, handouts are distributed to those being baptized containing the texts they need to learn by heart (the Symbol of Faith, the Lord's Prayer, and "O Theotokos Virgin"). At each talk a Gospel is read (or the Book of Acts), and after the talk the listeners should be asked what was hard to understand in the book that was read.

To make it easier to process the information, we point out the chief events of sacred history on the icons and frescos in the church.

Schedule of Catechetical Talks:

1) Talk on God: Who God Is. Teaching about His nature. The dogma of the Holy Trinity. A short teaching on grace (essence and energy). Revelation and its forms: Scripture and Tradition. Divine inspiration of the Bible as opposed to other writings. (In our area many Muslims come to be baptized, making

it necessary to demonstrate to them the difference between the Bible and the Koran.)

The Gospel of John is read with this talk, since it gives a superb account of the Divine Nature.

2) Talk on Creation and Man: Creation (with a brief refutation of evolution). Angels and their nature. The revolt of the Morning Star. The six days of creation. Human nature. The first-parents' fall into sin (with in-depth analysis of the text of Gen. 3 and how it relates to the typical behavior of modern man). The nature of original sin; nature's distortion and how it came under the power of Satan. A brief history of the Old Testament (the Flood, the Tower of Babel, the significance of the Law, the prophecies), with mention of its purpose: the birth of the Ever-virgin.

The Gospel of Mark is read with this talk.

3) Talk on Christ: Christology. Why the Divine Incarnation was necessary for salvation. The Annunciation. Teaching on the single Hypostasis and dual natures of Christ. The incarnation as overcoming "the wall of natures" (according to St. Nicholas Cabasilas). His Baptism. Temptations from Satan. Christ as King, Prophet, and High Priest. Transfiguration. The Passion (beginning with the Entry into Jerusalem, followed by Judas' betrayal, the Last Supper, Gethsemane, the arrest, judgment, Golgotha, and the descent into Hades). Redemption of sins through the substitutionary Sacrifice. The Resurrection as the beginning of victory over death. The Ascension as the glorification of human nature. Signs of the approach of the Second Coming.

The Antichrist. The Last Judgement. The torment of sinners and eternal life of the righteous.

The Gospel of Luke is read with this talk, because it provides the most detailed account of the Lord's earthly life.

4) Talk on the Church and the Sacraments. What the Church is. Analysis of the term. Birth of the Church: Pentecost. Properties of the Church: unity, sanctity, catholicity, and apostolicity. Church hierarchy. The sacraments. Baptism and chrismation (detailed commentary on the service order). Communion (definition and emphasis of the need for frequent communion). Confession. Marriage (emphasis on the chief canonical obstacles and the impermissibility of divorce and abortion). Unction. Ordination. What monasticism is. Fasts and feasts. Daily prayer. The order of the Liturgy is not described, as this is forbidden for catechumens, but after baptism a catechetical lecture on the Sacrament is held twice a year, at Pascha and Nativity.

The Book of Acts, which describes the birth of the Church, is read with this talk.

5) Talk on the Commandments: Moral Teaching. What good and evil are. Description of how sin originates in the heart. Passion as suffering. Virtue as good that has become a habit, and as something that makes us like the Creator. Deification as the goal of the Christian. The Ten Commandments (including a substantiation of why any given sin is evil, with a description of the corresponding virtue).

The Gospel of Matthew is read with this talk, as it gives the most detailed exposition of Christian teaching regarding good.

All catechumens are urged to pray at home, as well (except for the Lord's Prayer), and to come to church for Liturgy as often as possible, until the exclamation: "As many as are catechumens, depart."

Regarding how many people are baptized, these currently number more than one hundred each year. On average, about 60–70% of attendees receive holy baptism, while the rest at least learn what Christianity requires of them. There have been cases when people consciously refused to receive baptism, once they learned the faith of the Church, because Christianity goes against their convictions. I think their separation only benefited the Church, and even those who refused to be baptized realized that their views contradict the Word of God. When they come to their senses they will be able to consciously accept the faith.

Before baptism, confession must absolutely take place (without the prayer of absolution). The sacrament itself takes place during the baptismal Liturgy, except for during Great Lent. All the parishioners greet the newly-baptized with great joy, and many later say that this event itself helps even the regular parishioners to awaken from spiritual dormancy.

To avoid losing these ties with the newly-baptized, we have a tradition whereby, several days before Nativity and Pascha, the youth of the parish call all those who attended the talks and invite them to the festal services. Those who have been baptized

they invite to the catechetical lecture on the Sacrament. This approach helps people considerably to maintain contact with the Lord's House.

Thus, there is nothing in the patristic practice of baptism that is impossible today. Furthermore, I think that the restoration of this practice is our sole surety that our Church will continue to flourish with holiness in the future. And in this may God Almighty aid us!

BIOGRAPHY OF FATHER DANIEL SYSOEV

Birth, Baptism, and Youth

Father Daniel was born in Moscow on January 12, 1974, in a family of art teachers. His parents, were baptized after Daniel's birth; the boy himself was only baptized in 1977. This was because his grandmother, a devoted communist, tried to prevent this from happening, threatening his parents in various ways.

For a long time his parents attended church without their child. Then, at the age of 3, Daniel became gravely ill. The illness was so serious that his parents began to fear for Daniel's life, and so they decided to baptize the child regardless (by this time they already knew that no-one except a man born of water and the Spirit can enter the Kingdom of God).

From his early childhood Daniel dreamed of becoming a priest some day, and instead of playing ordinary games he loved to play at preaching. When his father began serving as an acolyte in the Church of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist in Afineyevo (near Moscow), Daniel had the opportunity to help him in the altar and to sing in the church choir.

More than anything else, young Daniel loved to listen to the lives of the saints and to paint pictures. The latter was not surprising, as he had grown up in a family of artists. He used to paint beautiful, paradisaical pictures of fantastic worlds: nature, mountains, animals, religious processions, and villages with many churches. The skies in his paintings were always filled with a glorious light.

Education at the Moscow Theological Seminary and Academy

Daniel entered the Moscow Seminary after graduating from school (in 1991). This was a hard time financially for Daniel and his family, so to support himself he began working as a tutor to the weaker students. The seminary was the perfect place for Daniel's favorite pastime: reading. He spent hours and hours in the library, studying the ancient books. At times he did not listen to the professors at the lectures because he already knew the information from books, but he didn't let the time go to waste: under his desk he was reading more books. His whole education strengthened him in his deep conviction that saving truth is to be found only in the Orthodox faith.

On May 13, 1995, Daniel was ordained a deacon by His Eminence Bishop Evgeny of Verey. That summer, on July 14, 1995, Daniel graduated from the Moscow Theological Seminary and enrolled as a correspondence student at the Moscow Theological Academy.

Father Daniel served at the Saints Peter and Paul Church in Yasenevo, Moscow, working at the missionary and educational center and in the rehabilitation center for victims of totalitarian cults and pseudo-religious movements.

In September of 1995 Father Daniel began working as a teacher at the Classical Orthodox School in Yasenevo, and in 1996 he was blessed by the patriarch to begin missionary Bible classes at the Krutitsy Patriarchal Metochian, for people who had suffered from the influence of sects and occultists. In 1997 he began giving regular talks on the Bible at the same metochion, which he continued to hold until his death. On May 24, 2000, Father Daniel was awarded a Letter of Commendation for his educational work by the Department of Religious Education and Catechesis.

Priesthood

In January of 2001, Father Deacon Daniel Sysoev was ordained a priest. In the same year his second daughter, Dorofeya, was born. Father Daniel's priesthood saw considerable travel, especially around Russia and the post-Soviet states. He preached fearlessly to both Orthodox and Muslims, and many of them turned to Christ. At the same time he worked as a professor at the Theological Seminary at St. Nicholas Monastery of Pererva, where he taught liturgics and missiology. In December 2005 Father Daniel was invited to his first open discussion with Muslims. He subsequently held similar discussions with various sectarian and pagan groups, and was invited to many TV and radio shows. Soon after he received his first threats from Muslims (and considerable criticism from pagans and nationalists).

In 2006 regular Bible talks began to be held at the Church of St. Thomas in Moscow — a parish church founded by Father Daniel himself. In addition to the talks Father Daniel began missionary courses for young people who were inspired to spread the God's Word among atheists, sectarians, Muslims, and others. Many of those who were converted to Orthodoxy by Father Daniel joined his missionary activities and also became missionaries. He used to say that everyone is called by the Lord to join His true Church and inherit eternal life, regardless of his or her national, cultural, or political background, because within the Orthodox Church all people become a nation in Christ.

Until his last days Father Daniel continued to travel extensively (his final trip and one of the last interviews with him occurred in Serbia), and to the very end he remained fearless in the face threats against his life.

The Day of the Martyr's Death for the Faith

The day of Father Daniels martyrdom began with the Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion. He then baptized a child and conducted a confirmation in Orthodoxy for a person who had fallen into occultism. In the evening Father Daniel held his usual Bible talks, after which he remained in the temple for a long time talking to the listeners and answering their questions. When almost everyone had left the temple he went into the altar to hear a confession. At that moment the kill-

er burst into the temple, wearing a mask and carrying a gun. He shouted: "Where is Sysoyev?" He began shooting, wounding the choir director. Father Daniel came out of the altar saying: "I am here," walked fearlessly towards the killer, and was mortally wounded. The killer then ran out of the temple. Father Daniel died a few hours later without regaining consciousness. He was 35 years old, with a wife and three daughters.

As has been stated, Father Daniel received numerous threats from people who wanted him to stop his mission. But preaching God's Word was more important to him than safety. He was murdered in the performance of his clerical duties, wearing his stole and cross.

On Friday night, November 20, 2009, a memorial service was held at St. Thomas Church, at which the friends and relatives of Father Daniel were present, as well as members of his missionary school and the local community.

On the following Monday Moscow bade a final farewell to the deceased Father Daniel. The funeral service was held at Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Yasenevo, where Father Daniel's father had served as a priest. The service was conducted by Bishop Arseny (Epifanov). Hundreds of Orthodox believers came to bid farewell to the priest.

About two hundred clergymen gathered in the temple, in white vestments, holding lighted candles. Standing out against the white vestments were Father Daniel's relatives, dressed in black mourning. After the service, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia served a memorial litiya at the coffin and gave the eulogy for the tragically murdered Father Daniel Sysoev.

Father Daniel is buried at the Church of the Holy Mandylion cemetery in Kuntsevo, Moscow. The 40th day after his death — the day of the soul's partial judgment, according to Orthodox tradition — was his name day, the feast of the holy prophet Daniel (December 30).

A Pastor's Spiritual Labor

Father Daniel's service to God was filled with events so numerous that they would fill a book. He helped people to discover and understand the Truth. It was his dream to preach God's Word to all people and nations around the world. He guided people to the path of moral and spiritual perfection amid the modern conditions of life, and called all to adhere to the apostolic principle: "*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*" (Romans 12:18).

Father Daniel knew God and loved Him with all his heart and soul. Father Daniel's love for God was true and sacrificial. Father Daniel endured martyrdom for Christ. He has left considerable work for us to do, as well. For each and every Orthodox Christian the life in Christ is the most important part of living. And this good intention — to live in Christ — has an intercessor in Father Daniel, because the Orthodox know that he is alive, and is praying for all those who have gone astray.

PRIESTS HAVE DIED, LEAVING FAMILIES BEHIND …

Together we can help them!

May the Lord grant His faithful servants eternal rest in the tabernacles of the righteous! For your generous donations:

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THE REV. DANIEL SYSOEV MISSIONARY CENTER

Benevolent Fund was established in 2010 by priest Daniel Sysoev's wife, Yulia Sysoev, to aid the needy families and widows of clergy. Unfortunately, there are many financially disadvantaged clergy families in Russia, but the greatest financial need is felt by the widows of priests who have fallen victim to murder or tragedy, and we Christians have a duty to care for them.

In recent times we have seen a rise in sudden deaths among our intercessors before God – those who pray for us more often than others, through whom the Lord forgives our sins, from whom we receive comfort. At present the Fund has learned of and established contact with 45 such families, and is constantly searching for clergy families in need so as to provide them with uncompensated aid.

We call on Orthodox Christians to contribute their two mites to supporting the work of the Fund. Contact information and donation options are located on our website, www.mission-center.com, in the "Charity" section. Donors, as the Word of God says, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven and robe your hearts in works of charity; and you who are in need, offer up prayers for your benefactors' salvation!

For your generous donations:

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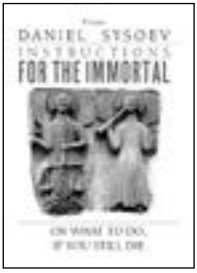
OTHER BOOKS
OF PRIEST DANIEL SYSOEV

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE IMMORTAL, OR WHAT TO DO IF YOU STILL DIE



In the few months since it appeared, this unusually-titled book by the famous priest and missionary Fr. Daniel Sysoev has quickly become a bestseller. What should you do if you end up dying after all? Unfortunately, many people try to avoid the question of death; yet death, like it or not, is unavoidable.

Following divine revelation and the experience of the Church, Fr. Daniel paints a perfectly logical picture of the human soul transitioning from mortality to eternity. The author gives us advice on how to behave correctly at this most important of events for every person, how not to be afraid, how to pass through the Aerial Toll-houses, and what will await us after death. The author likewise describes the church doctrines regarding heaven and hell.

PRIEST DANIEL SYSOEV. DEACON GEORGIY MAXIMOV. HOW OFTEN SHOULD ONE COMMUNE?

Every Christian gives thought to the question of how often one should commune. In asking the advice of various priests, one may hear opinions that discourage frequent communion by the laity, or on the contrary one may be advised to approach the Holy Chalice as often as possible, especially on holy days. In certain churches it has been the practice since Soviet times not to commune parishioners on Pascha and Bright Week.

But what does the Church say about this? What canons and rules exist to determine the frequency with which the faithful take part in the sacrament of Holy Communion?

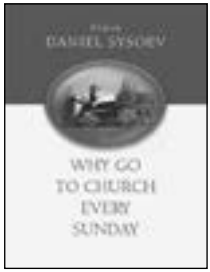
This booklet explains the necessity of frequent communion, presenting the reader with detailed supporting arguments from the works of the Holy Fathers and the church canons.

A PROTESTANT'S WALK THROUGH AN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Truth can endure no falsehood, and herself finds those who seek her. But there is one condition: one must reject one's own opinion and prefer the Lord's, and seek not oneself, but God. It is no easy thing to leave off your former way of life and the things of which you were convinced, thinking you were on the right path. But it is those who are willing to do this that God calls His chosen.

This book is an actual conversation with a young Protestant, who himself approached an Orthodox passer-by one spring morning. Was he seeking the truth? What answers did the Orthodox Christian give him and how did he behave? Did anything change in their hearts after their dialogue, and who was proven right? The reader will witness their conversation and will hear numerous arguments grounded in Holy Scripture.

WHY GO TO CHURCH EVERY SUNDAY?



Even some people who call themselves Orthodox are of the opinion that going to church every Sunday is bordering on fanaticism. There are plenty of justifications for this view: "Sunday is my only day off"; "I can pray just as well at home"; "It annoys my family", and so on.

In this book an Orthodox missionary priest invites the reader to see for himself the invalidity of such views.

TALKS ON THE PASSIONS

We must know our enemies. The passions and those who help to reinforce them are the enemy's seed. And God summons us to do battle with them throughout our life. But how do we learn the tactics? Using the experience of the Church and the works of the holy fathers, Fr. Daniel explains how sin operates in a person's soul, and the techniques for fighting it. These lectures will move each to give thought to the need for making a concentrated effort to cleanse his soul for God.

By God's mercy, over the last 20 years Orthodox communities have been being established in several countries of Asia and Africa. However, there are still many countries in the world where there is not a single Orthodox parish. In the prayer "Our Father" we pray: "Thy Kingdom come". By this we are asking God the Father to quickly send the Kingdom of Peace, eternal life, where "*there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away*" (Rev. 21:4). Yet by neglecting missionary work we are delaying the second coming of the Savior. For He said: "*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come*." Not everyone can be an apostle, but each can contribute his two mites to the furtherance of Orthodox mission. Money is vital for this work, since each of these Orthodox missionary communities abroad is experiencing acute financial difficulty.

1. Cambodia. The most pressing need for Orthodoxy to spread in Cambodia is the purchase of real estate and the construction of Orthodox churches. This is a unique opportunity to assist the growth of Orthodoxy in a historically non-Christian country.

2. India. The field for missionary work on Indian soil is ready to be sown. Yet though "*the harvest truly is plenteous ... the labourers are few*". The local populace is highly religious, but lack information about the true faith. Hardly any of the local Christians have ever even heard of the Orthodox faith. Currently Orthodox parishes are being formed in Goa, Bangalore, and Chandrapur District (near Nagpur). Funds are needed for the salary of a full-time priest, construction of chapels, rental buildings, and translations into local languages.

3. Tuva (Russia). The Tuva nation only became part of Russia in the 20th century, and Orthodox missionary efforts here are just beginning. Missionaries are needed who are well-versed in Orthodox theology, active in the Church, and experienced in chanting the church services. Men are preferred.

4. The Philippines is an absolutely beautiful country, inhabited by wonderful people. It is particularly interesting in that it is

the only country in South East Asia that has adopted Christianity. The overwhelming majority of the inhabitants are Catholics, though in recent years there has been a growing number of Protestants. Most surprising, however, is that the most highly venerated object in the Philippines is ... an Orthodox icon! God grant that all Filipinos whose hearts are open to the truth may learn about the Orthodox Church.

5. Hong Kong. There are currently around 13,000 Orthodox Christians living in China, who for historical reasons have been deprived for decades of the opportunity to pray in churches. They are in urgent need of prayer books, catechisms, and theological texts in Chinese.

An Orthodox brotherhood dedicated to Holy Apostles Peter and Paul was founded in Hong Kong in 2004, to promote the restoration of the Orthodox Church in China and to support the Hong Kong parish of Saints Peter and Paul. In the 10 years of its existence the brotherhood has translated into Chinese and published over 20 books and numerous religious educational publications.

The brotherhood is developing a number of educational projects and helps support Chinese students of Orthodox educational institutions and Russian seminarians studying in China.

6. Thailand. On June 20, 2008, the Thai government officially recognized the Orthodox Church and registered the Fund of the Orthodox Church in Thailand as a legal entity under Thai law. This opens a whole new range of possibilities, and enables us to more freely and fruitfully pursue our endeavors.

Brothers and sisters, this is our world – ours and our children's. It is up to us to build it. Let it be enough that we ourselves lived through times of godlessness, of renunciation of the faith of our fathers and our historical roots. Let our children grow up to be better off, not only materially, but spiritually and morally. For "*what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*" (Mt. 16:26).

Read more on our website at www.mission-center.com, under "Mission".

Priest Daniel Sysoev

Catechetical Talks

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